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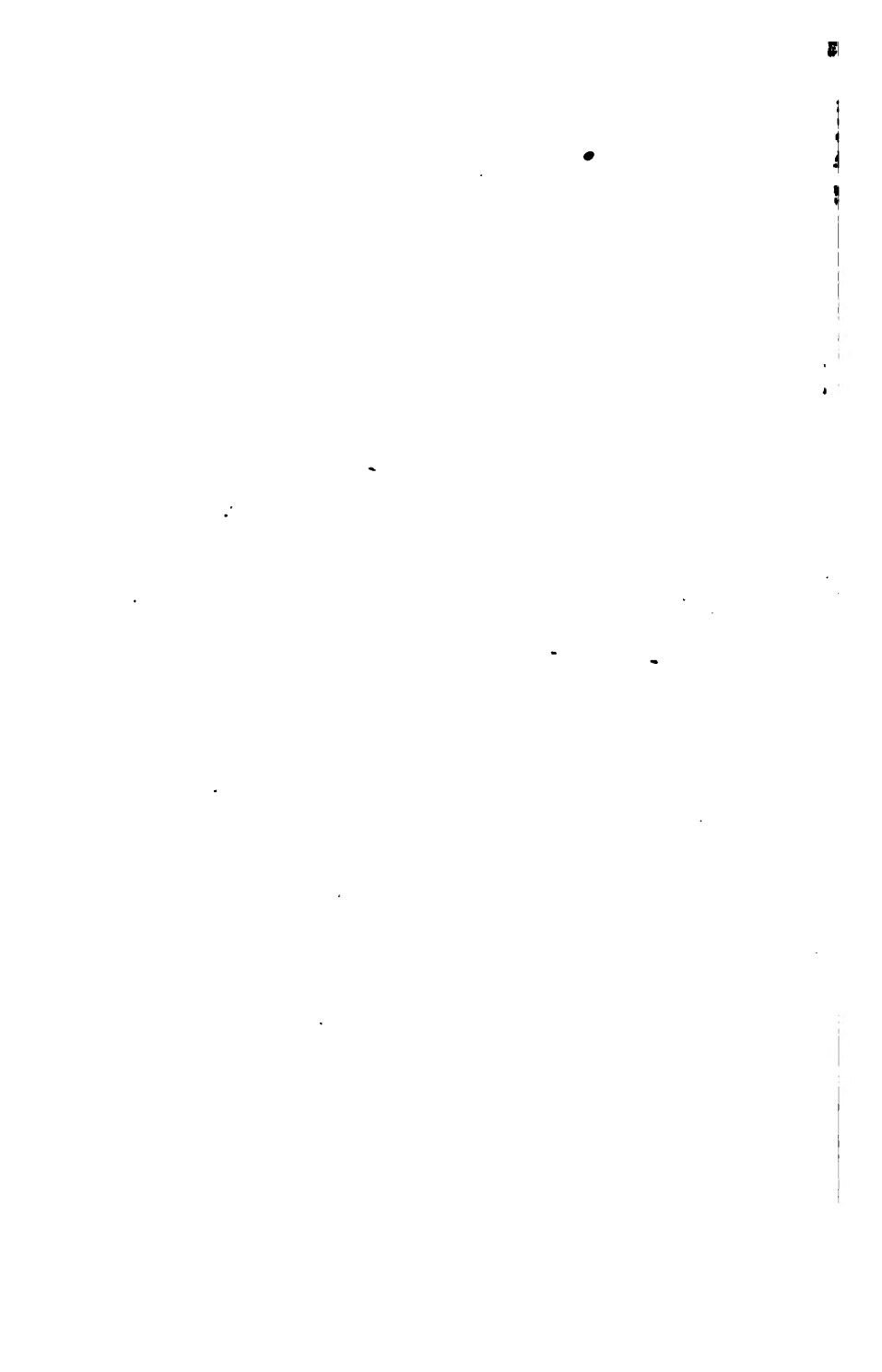
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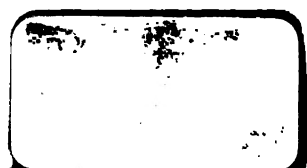
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Y O U N G L O V E ;

A N O V E L.

BY
MRS. TROLLOPE,

AUTHORESS OF "THE VICAR OF WREXHILL," "THE BARNABYS IN
AMERICA," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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Y O U N G L O V E.

CHAPTER I.

“DANS le pays des aveugles, les borgnes sont rois.” Happy is the man who, wishing to live and die in the aromatic odour of country greatness, yet possessing but a moderate estate, has his acres situated in a neighbourhood where there is no dukery.

Colonel William Henry Dermont, of THE MOUNT, was a happy man ; for in this very essential particular he was blest beyond the common lot of English country gentlemen, having neither duke, marquis,

earl, viscount, baron, baronet, nay, not even a knight, within many miles of him ; and with a snug, well-wooded little estate, producing at easy rents very little less than four thousand a year, he knew himself to be, by far, the greatest man in the neighbourhood, and that, too, without having to do battle for the pre-eminence either at assizes, sessions, or rail-road meetings.

The Mount was situated in a parish called Stoke, but respecting the name of the county I shall be silent—for how many might I not offend by naming any county, with a statement annexed, setting forth that there was a part of it where, for many miles, there was not such a thing as a nobleman's seat to be seen !

The Mount, however, was a very nice, comfortable, pretty place, with plenty of wood and water around it, and built moreover, with every suitable accommodation for a family possessed of such a revenue as I have mentioned, but without any out-of-the-common-way extravagances in stables,

dog-kennels, and pineries, demanding every day of the year greater expenditure than it is at all times convenient to make. The soil was kindly, and grateful for the care bestowed upon it, producing good returns of corn and butter, fruit and flowers. What could any reasonable man or woman wish for more ?

I do not believe that either Colonel Dermont or his wife did wish for any thing more. They were, indeed, of that happily-born class of people, who are inclined to think that every thing they possess is a good deal better than any thing of the same kind possessed by any body else. This is certainly a most desirable temperament, as far as relates to the parties who possess it ; but it may occasionally be found a little fatiguing to the spirits of others, as it causes their conversation to be rather too much in the same key. But in no other respect could the most envious individuals of their acquaintance find any reason to complain of

this happy peculiarity. In no degree could they be reasonably considered as unusually stiff or stately in their demeanour, or in any way overbearing or morose in their conscious superiority. The very worst that could be said of them was, that they were fully aware of their many advantages over the majority of their fellow-creatures, and that they enjoyed, with a good deal of relish, the happiness of believing that they held rather an elevated place in creation. It must be a very ill-tempered being who could find fault with this.

They had been married, at the time my narrative begins, rather more than six years, and had scarcely ever had any dispute whatever, much less any disagreement which could deserve the name of a quarrel. This proves, beyond all possibility of doubt, that they were both good-tempered people—and so, indeed, they were ; but besides being good-tempered, they really did think wonderfully alike upon all subjects, so that, to say

the truth, it would have been by no means easy for them to have found any thing to quarrel about.

They had but one child ; luckily, however, this was a boy, and certainly, without exaggeration, one of the finest that ever was born. He was exceedingly handsome, and very intelligent ; and although at times a little headstrong and whimsical, which his nurse thought might probably be owing to his being rather more indulged than other children, he had a generous and affectionate temper, which most people seemed to think atoned for his naughtiness.

But what was of even greater consequence than either his beauty, his intelligence, or his good temper, he was very strong and healthy, so that there was no danger that the Mount and its appurtenances should pass away from the race. Perhaps, though they never did appear to think themselves unfortunate in any thing, and, in fact, never spoke upon this particular subject at all, they might have been

as well pleased had heaven given them two or three more children, for Mrs. Dermont had a pretty little fortune of fifteen thousand pounds, which was settled upon "younger children," and the not having any younger children at all, made this settlement seem abortive. But although some such thoughts might, during the first years of their marriage, have produced a feeling somewhat resembling regret, it was neither very strong nor very lasting, and the well-satisfied father and mother soon found that there was no difficulty whatever in pouring forth all the paternal love that it was possible human hearts could feel, upon one. The want of a daughter was, moreover, in some degree supplied by the presence of a little orphan girl, who had been thrown upon their protection and kindness under very interesting circumstances.

When Colonel Dermont was quite a young man, he had insisted, like a good many other quite young men, upon being permitted to put on a red coat ; a favour

which was granted to him very reluctantly, and which probably would never have been granted to him at all, had the disagreeable result of the young gentleman's being sent to India been contemplated. To India, however, he went ; and most assuredly would never have lived to come back again and take possession of the Mount, had it not been for the timely aid of a brother officer, who, seeing him hard pushed, galloped to his side exactly in time to save his life.

Major Drummond, the gallant officer who performed this service for him, did not survive it long ; for a wound, received in the same action, though not fatal at the time, caused his death, after a lingering confinement of three or four months.

During this melancholy interval, he was attended as assiduously by Colonel Dermont as by his miserable wife ; and soon after his death, the grateful young man had the melancholy satisfaction of being greatly useful to his widow, by attending her and her young daughter to England.

Had the young lady, who was just seventeen, been less of an invalid upon the voyage, it is probable that the young gentleman would have fallen in love with her, for she was a very charming creature; but destiny had decided otherwise for them; and although Miss Drummond, when well enough to appear at all, constantly found the handsome Colonel Dermont at her side, the intercourse between them consisted wholly in acts of the most thoughtful and kind-hearted attention on the part of the young officer, and of something very like motherly and sisterly affection towards him, on the part of the widow and orphan in return.

Colonel Dermont married within a few months after his return to England, the early loss of both his parents having put him in possession of his estate; and the friendship of his kind-hearted wife proved a source of great, and, alas! of greatly-needed comfort to his unfortunate India friends.

Four years after the marriage of Colonel

Dermont, Miss Drummond followed his example, and became, for a few months, the happy wife of a not very wealthy, but very worthy clergyman of the same race and name. But this happy union was dissolved by the sudden death of Mr. Drummond, and within a year after it had taken place, an infant grand-daughter was the only earthly source of consolation left to the unhappy widow of Major Drummond; for her daughter did not survive its birth an hour.

The interval of sorrow and sickness which followed was but short, the heart-broken widow soon followed, and the orphan babe was consigned to the guardianship of Colonel Dermont, and the maternal kindness of his wife, before she had completed her third year.

The little Julia, of course, became immediately an inmate at "the Mount," and the nursery establishment for the two children was as completely the same, as if they had indeed been the offspring of the same parents. The fortune of the little orphan girl did not

much exceed the moderate amount of seven thousand pounds; and her good guardian and his wife pleased themselves by the thought, that her long minority, although by her grandmother's will, she was to be of age at seventeen, would make a very respectable addition to this little sum, provided the proceeds were carefully hoarded for her. Never had Colonel Dermont forgotten the moment of peril, in which the arm of his little ward's gallant grandfather saved his life, and the watching over her, and her little fortune, was a source of constant pleasure to him.

But, notwithstanding these amiable sentiments on his part, and very truly sympathetic feelings of no less amiable a quality on that of his wife, they could neither of them ever bring themselves to forget that the fine, noble-looking Alfred was their own child, and that the *chétive* little Julia was not. This difference, however, was not such as in any degree to injure the little girl, or interfere with her happiness. It only made her feel,

indeed, that although she was as gay and as happy as the petted dog, Bingo, himself, she was of no more consequence than he; a conviction which brought no pain with it, nor ever caused her for a moment to wish that she was as important a personage as Alfred—nay, it may be doubted if she would ever, even in the moments when he was the most indulged, have consented to change with him. She was a quick little thing, and of so gay and happy a temperament, that as soon as she began to think at all, she made up her mind to believe, that though only a little girl, (which, of course, she knew was but a very second-rate sort of animal in creation,) she was the best off of the two—inasmuch, as she was permitted to trot here and there, according to her own whim and will, while the idolised Alfred was watched through every moment of the day, as if the welfare of the universe depended upon his not being too hot nor too cold, too fasting nor too fed, too much in movement, or too much at rest.

As to Alfred himself, he was by no means dull enough not to perceive how remarkably exalted a place he occupied in the estimation of human beings in general ; and by the time he was eight years old, he was as fully aware that there was nobody in the house of so much importance as himself, as ever Samuel Johnson felt, when inhabiting the mansion of Mrs. Thrale. This was a very great misfortune, and the beautiful boy was not likely to pass through life without suffering from it.

CHAPTER II.

OF course, if not absolutely impossible, it is at least very highly improbable, that any family in possession of an estate more than double in amount of rent-roll, to that of any other body within a dozen miles of them, should have many near neighbours with whom they can associate on terms of perfect equality. This is not to be hoped for ; and there may be some persons, perhaps, who may think that it is not to be wished ; but be this as it may, in the case of our excellent Colonel and Mrs. Dermont, although they had the advantage of several friendly and agreeable neighbours, there was not one who was not deemed by all the others, second in

importance, and at a considerable distance, to "the charming family at the Mount."

That Colonel and Mrs. Dermont subscribed to this classification is most certain, but it is equally so, that they did this with as little departure from amiable feeling on their own part, as possible, and with a more complete absence of every look, word, act, or even gesticulation, which could produce a painful effect upon their neighbours, than can reasonably be expected, in one case out of five hundred, among persons similarly situated.

In short, the Dermonts were very highly esteemed, respected, and liked; nay, there were one or two individuals in the neighbourhood, who were conscious of some little importance themselves, who did not scruple to say, they "loved them dearly," and the Dermonts in return, appeared to have a very great regard for almost every body. They never gave less than two very handsome dinners every month; not to mention the invariable rule which they laid down for

themselves of having the principal members of about half a dozen families who lived too far off for conveniently returning home after dinner, to stay with them for three days at a time during the summer, and three days at a time during the winter of every year.

These were duties of hospitality which they would have thought it almost as great a sin to omit, as the weekly donations of milk and vegetables in summer, soup and coals in winter, and as much physic as they chose all the year round, to the poor of their own parish.

Neither were these duties of hospitality performed with regularity only, they were performed well also. The dinners (considering that they had only a female artist) were pretty nearly as good as dinners beyond *fourgon* reach of either London or Paris could be. There was a pianoforte always in very tolerable tune, for the use of young ladies, when they were of the singing and playing class; there were always two Books of Beauty of the current year on the draw-

ing room table; in winter there was always a very good fire, and in summer there were always abundance of flowers—and then there was always Alfred to be looked at.

Nor were the preparations for the staying company less perfect. The admirable rule laid down by Sir Walter, was always strictly adhered to—there was the “the rest day, the dressed day, and the pressed day.” On the first, Mrs. Dermont herself never failed to accompany each lady guest to her chamber, when she retired to make her toilet for dinner, reminding her where the bell was that would bring her maid with hot water from the house-keeper’s room, and where that which would summon her from the regions above—she never failed on these occasions to say, “you must not give yourself any trouble about dressing to-day. We shall have nobody but our good clergyman. To morrow we hope to get some friends to meet you.” On the second day the young ladies were recommended, if the weather were favourable, to walk in the wilderness,

not only because they would find shade, but because they would have no rough paths to encounter; and the old ladies were invited to look at the conservatory. For the gentlemen, old and young, there were fishing-rods in spring and summer, and guns in the autumn and winter, not to mention battledore and shuttlecock, and the billiard-table all the year round. On the third day both the colonel and his lady declared that their guests must not think of going, for that their kind neighbours the *A's* and the *B's*; and, if it were fine, the *C's* and the *D's* also, were all coming up in the evening, and perhaps they might get up a little dance or play charades—and, moreover, Alfred had been promised that he should stay up as long as he liked;—positively they must not go. And all this was done and said with so much condescending kindness, that it was quite impossible not to declare that the Dermonts were certainly the most delightful people in the world—a perfect blessing to the neighbourhood in general, and most particularly so to “those

who were intimate with them," which of course was a happiness that a good many laid claim to.

This annual routine went on with wonderful regularity for many years, the only, or at least the principal irregularity in it arising from the greater or less degree, in which Alfred mixed himself with the guests. It cannot be doubted that in a house so every way agreeable as the Mount, the words and the smiles, nay, even the cuffs and the kicks which the young heir condescended to bestow upon the company, were ever received with delight. Nor, as the young gentleman grew older, were the gratifications derived from his society confined to these varying caresses; for sometimes he would endearingly fix himself upon some highly-favoured individual, follow him or her, as it might happen to be, from room to room throughout the house, insist upon sharing the chair of the flattered guest at table; and, upon one occasion, screamed for an hour and a half because not permitted to share the bed of a lady who

had won his heart of hearts by telling him a fairy tale. Of course the beautiful Alfred was the pest of the house at least as much as the pet, and there could not be stronger proof that the acquaintance of its owners was highly valued by the neighbourhood, than the fact of its continuing to be the fashion to accept every invitation they gave, despite the manifold torments inflicted by their hopeful heir. Those, however, who were really sufficiently intimate in the family to know the young gentleman thoroughly, were aware that great relief might be obtained from his persecutions by employing the agency of the little Julia. It required, however, a good deal of familiarity with the interior of the establishment to learn this, for the diminutive and odd-looking little girl elicited very little notice from any one. Colonel and Mrs. Dermont, knowing that the child was perfectly well, and perfectly happy, did not feel it at all necessary to drag her forward into notice, in spite of the very evident indifference of all their guests towards

her. This general indifference had two causes: the first and most important being, that evidently there would be no use in taking notice of her, for that no one would be likely to receive the more notice from the colonel and his lady in return; not, however, that the colonel and his lady could have had the slightest objection to her being made as much the object of attention as was consistent with the superior claims of Alfred. They gave her precisely this degree of notice themselves, and they took it for granted that every body else did the same.

The second reason for her being so constantly overlooked and forgotten, arose from the fact that there really was nothing about her calculated to attract an unobservant eye. She was not absolutely ugly, but most assuredly she was not pretty; and, in truth, the only epithet that would do her justice, was that employed above—she was *odd-looking*. Her little round head had the appearance of a black ball, so dark and smooth was the short, straight, thick hair

that covered it. Her features were small, and perhaps regular, but there was nothing attractive in this; for her colourless complexion was so completely devoid of the pretty freshness which is so charming in children, that nobody was tempted to look at her with sufficient attention to discover whether the little nose, mouth, and chin, were well formed or not. Even her forehead, which really was broad, high, and well-shaped, in no way assisted her appearance, for her thick, coal-black hair was not even parted in front, and completely covered it, together with the pretty-enough little pencilled eyebrows ;—nay, her black eyes, too, lost a good deal of their effect (if, indeed, they had any), by the pent-house-like projection of this same black mass of hair; and it may fairly be doubted if any body living had ever observed either the length and richness of her eyelashes, or the size and shape of the dark eyes themselves.

The most marked observation that had ever yet been uttered upon her appearance,

was from a lively young lady, who, after looking at her for a minute or two, burst into a laugh, and said, "Is not that little creature like a magpie?—I never saw any thing else so completely black and white;" and the only word expressive of admiration which her little person had ever called forth, was an exclamation on the extreme smallness of her feet; but even this prettiness was less remarkable in her, poor little thing, than it would have been in any one else, from the universally tiny proportions of her singularly small person.

Her nurse was wont to say that she was a sharp little pin with a black head; and the simile was not a bad one, for as she stood upright, with her tiny feet close together, she really did almost look pointed. But this, however, was not the *sharpness* to which her nurse alluded: her phrase referred to a certain quickness of intellect, for which she was inclined to give her credit, but which, however, did not appear to be appreciated by any other member of the fa-

mily, unless, indeed, it was by the important Alfred himself. That there was *something* in the little girl's prattle when she was fairly set going, might be inferred from the fact, that if Julia at any time made up her mind to get Alfred away from any study, any play, or any person, she had only to buzz around him for a few minutes, much in the manner of a bee before it settles itself upon a flower, and though he was sure to begin with scolding her, and bidding her not be such a plague, she never failed to get something like honey at last; for the experiment invariably ended by his turning away from book, plaything, or playfellow, in order either to listen to some long story she was bent upon telling him, or else to accompany her upon some important expedition, wherein he was to be either useful or agreeable.

Now as it was a certain fact, "*bien, mais bien constaté*," that Master Alfred Dermont never did do any thing, or go anywhere, unless he preferred the said doing or going.

to every thing else which, for the time being, could be said or done, it seems evident that he, as well as the nurse, had discovered some species of talent in Julia. Yet this peculiarity in the intercourse between the two children is badly described, for it seems to convey the idea of wilfulness on the part of the little girl—a consciousness, that is, of having a will of her own, and a strong inclination to have that will complied with—an inference altogether wrong and erroneous; for it is quite certain that Julia had lived a great many years longer in the world than we have yet given her, before any idea or sensation of having a will of her own had arisen in her mind. Had she at any moment been asked to tell what she liked, she would probably have laughed heartily, and replied, “any thing;” and if desired to say what she liked *best*, she might have laughed more heartily still, and cried, “every thing.” No, it was not a spirit of wilfulness that led little Julia to interfere with the proceedings of

her young companion; but it is easier to say what it was not, than to explain precisely what it was.

Notwithstanding the difference of age and sex—for Alfred Dermont was nearly four years older than Julia Drummond—but notwithstanding this, their education, such as it was, went on together; that is to say, that when Alfred was six years old, a governess was engaged, to whom both children were immediately consigned as pupils. She was an intelligent young woman, and when the tiny Julia was led in, as one of her intended scholars, she received her with a pleasant smile, which immediately won the little girl's heart; and having parted the thick hair upon her forehead (the first time that such an operation had ever been performed), and looked for a moment into the dark eyes that were raised to meet her own, she troubled Mrs. Dermont with no questions as to what she wished to have her taught.

But if the education of Julia threatened to

be rather premature, that of Alfred appeared very decidedly the reverse, for never as yet had his bright blue eyes been requested to fix themselves on the letters of the alphabet. This was rather a shock to the governess, which was not lessened by the young gentleman's saying, with very manly decision of tone, after his first lesson had continued about five minutes, looking full in poor Miss Harding's face as he spoke, "I think you are a very ugly person, and I think your play is a very stupid play, and if you ever ask me to play at it again, I will kick you.—Come along, Julia! those nasty ivory things are not half so pretty to play with as your doll."

Miss Harding, poor young woman, felt as many similarly situated young women have felt before, that she had rather a steep uphill path before her—but she felt also that she was not to be paid for nothing; and with a gentle sigh she watched the children run off, sitting immoveable in the place where

they left her, in deep meditation upon the ways and means to which it would be necessary to resort.

It is, however, needless to follow the patient labours of Miss Harding through the process of teaching the heir of the Mount to read; the intelligent reader will doubtless have anticipated the fact, that it was achieved at last, the only part of the business at all out of the common way being the extraordinary degree of assistance which the governess derived from Julia. At two years old she had spoken with perfect distinctness, and before she was four, she could read any book that was set before her. It was pretty to watch the devices by which the little creature contrived to conquer and baffle the averseness of her playfellow to follow her example. She exhibited during the process as many tricks as a monkey; for, either from temperament or instinct, all her manœuvrings were full of fun, and it was often amidst shouts of laughter, and oftener still in a game of romps upon the floor, that Master Alfred, in the

course of two years, acquired, what it had cost Julia about six months to learn.

But enough of these infant details. We must leave Alfred at eight, and Julia at four-and-a-half years old, and say no more about them till a dozen long years have passed over their heads.

CHAPTER III.

It has been said, and very truly, that it is not the *where*, but the *who*, which is chiefly important in the history of human beings; and therefore, although for reasons which have been sufficiently explained, I have declined naming the county in which the scenes which I am about to recount occurred, I shall not be equally scrupulous respecting the people who took part in them, but take the liberty of describing the most prominent among them with equal freedom and sincerity.

That they shall all be real human beings, who are existing, or who have existed, I faithfully promise and declare; but I faith-

fully promise and declare likewise, that I will so manage matters as to leave no clue whatever to the recognition of the originals.

And now, shall I go "from house to house," like a royal *brief*, in order to bring my reader acquainted with all the neighbours who formed the society of Colonel and Mrs. Dermont?—or shall I content myself by narrating the adventures of my "principal family," and suffer all the rest to bring themselves forward in succession, as circumstances shall dictate? Perhaps I shall find myself obliged to have recourse to both.

At twenty years old, Alfred Dermont was certainly one of the very handsomest young men that ever was seen. He was six feet in height, but might have stood for the model of an Apollo. His features were magnificently handsome, and had his countenance expressed less of the daring self-confidence in which he had been so assiduously educated, it would have been charming—for the bright large blue eye was beaming with intelligence; his smile, though too often so

timed as to be most saucily impertinent, displayed teeth of the most perfect beauty, and his forehead might have been compared to that of any god or demigod that ever chisel cut, had not the frequent arching of the too flexible eyebrow, continually suggested the idea of contempt for those around him.

His education had been of so strangely irregular a kind, as almost to defy description. He certainly was not ignorant, and yet he could scarcely be said to be thoroughly well-informed on any subject—for his studies had in no direction ever gone beyond the point to which his inclination led him, and the moment he ceased to be amused, he ceased to study. When he had attained the age of twelve years, there had been some slight notion, or rather a great deal of unmeaning talk, about sending him to Eton. But his father confessed to his mother, and his mother confessed to his father, that it was no good to talk about it, for that they *could not* part with him, and having separately and

conjointly come to this decision, they determined, like sensible people, to act upon it.

They did act upon it; and Alfred Dermont never left the paternal roof, either for school or college. But tutors, English, French, and German, were bestowed upon him with the greatest liberality; and as the boy was really a quick boy, and some of the tutors really clever men, the result was a sort of patchwork; some portions of which were brilliant and effective, while "other some" were a good deal the reverse. As to Julia, Colonel Dermont continued steadfast in his amiable resolution, that not a single shilling of her fortune, either principal or interest, should ever be expended on her till, having arrived at majority, she should expend it herself. But the home education of Alfred was an expensive one, for it included horses, dogs, a town-built cab for the young gentleman's own particular driving, *et cætera*, *et cætera*; without mentioning a constantly increasing collection of books in a variety of

languages—so that the Colonel observed to his wife, that when Miss Harding went, there could be no objection to Julia's taking lessons with Alfred as she had hitherto always done; and that its being from a tutor instead of a governess, could make no difference. Nor did the little Julia herself, nor her friend, Alfred, nor any of the learned professors concerned, make any objection to the arrangement; and though the feminine accomplishments of music and drawing were left out, Julia became possessed of a larger portion of general information than generally falls to the lot of young ladies.

But at sixteen Julia continued to be a queer-looking little creature still, so much so indeed, that nobody thought it civil to talk about her appearance; and as her intellectual acquirements, whether great or little, were utterly unknown, save to her instructors and her friend Alfred, there was nothing to redeem her from the sort of easy oblivion which seemed to be her fate. But never did a happier creature exist on God's earth.

Her health was excellent, her spirits gay and equal ; she learnt all that was set before her with equal facility and correctness ; and as she never for a single instant made herself, her situation, her accomplishments, or her person, the subject of her own thoughts, she lived in a state of the most delightful unconsciousness as to her own insignificance.

It is curious to observe how very many evils and sufferings are avoided by people who are not occupied habitually in thinking of themselves. Such people are never shy ; such people are rarely awkward ; such people have the command of their own powers of mind in a degree that never can be enjoyed by the egotist. Good Colonel Dermont, when soothing himself, as he occasionally did, by boasting that he had given Julia Drummond an excellent education, little guessed how very excellent it had been. He knew not that he had smothered and annihilated in the heart of his ward the most fatal weakness that can beset humanity ; and

still less, perhaps, did he guess, that while conferring this inestimable benefit upon her, he was overwhelming his unfortunate son by fostering and cherishing in him, by every possible device, the identical mental malady from which she had so happily escaped. Nevertheless, it did not follow that, because little Julia Drummond was free from all illusions arising from self-love, she was free likewise from all illusions likely to arise from love to others. These, however, though often dangerous and mischievous, are very far from threatening the same degree of moral destruction which is pretty nearly inevitable upon the other; and therefore Julia, although at sixteen and a half she loved and admired Alfred rather more blindly, perhaps, than even his mother and father themselves, was in no danger of having any of the fine qualities of her heart destroyed thereby. Far different, alas ! was the condition of Alfred at the age of twenty. Nature had done as much for him as for her; but though brought up side by side, and receiving what

a superficial observer might call the same education, one little moral ingredient being different rendered the result rather a contrast than a resemblance. Poor Alfred ! how truly, simply, and sincerely did he believe himself to be one of the most glorious specimens of humanity that had ever been created. How firmly was he convinced of the necessity of his having his own will and his own way in all things, in order that every thing should go right! And oh! how many good gifts were neutralised, if not positively destroyed, by this conviction, and the headstrong wilfulness which accompanied it.

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“What a delightful summer we seem likely to have,” said Mrs. Dermont to her husband, as they stood side by side looking down their beautiful lawn, and admiring the wide circle of fine flowering shrubs which surrounded it. “Don’t you think, Colonel, that it would be a good scheme, if this fine weather lasts, to invite the whole neighbour-

hood together to something of a public breakfast on the lawn?—with music and dancing, you know. I think it would please Alfred, for he said yesterday that he wished there was a little more variety in our parties. He said it quite seriously.”

“Did he?” returned the colonel, with a look of great interest; “then I am sure we ought to manage to get a little more variety, and a dance on the lawn would be quite new, certainly. But how shall we get enough young men together? Ladies cannot dance without gentlemen, you know.”

“There is but one way, my dear colonel,” replied the lady; “you must ask all the officers that are quartered at Overby, *en masse*. People of consequence in a neighbourhood very often do that, you know, without having any personal introduction at all.”

“Yes, I know they do,” replied the colonel; “and I have no sort of objection, if Alfred approves it. It will lead to no great danger of making disagreeable acquaintance,

for I dare say they will be sent off again, as soon as the talk about riots is over. Alfred and I can ride to Overby, and speak to Major Sommerton about it. He is an old acquaintance, you know, and would give me a hint if there was any objection. Where is Alfred? Of course, we must not decide upon it till we have asked him. Have you seen him since breakfast? I looked for him in the library just now, but he was not there. Have you seen him?"

"Yes, colonel; I saw him within this half hour, walking away towards the wilderness with a book in his hand. What an extraordinary creature he is, to be sure! He certainly takes a pleasure in reading, even now that his education is so completely finished, as to render it quite unnecessary," said the mother. "He is a very extraordinary young man!"

"He is an extraordinary creature in every way!" replied the father. "But, if he is gone to the wilderness, let us go there too, and speak to him about this scheme of

yours," he added, offering his arm to his wife.

After a few minutes walking in the shade of the nicely kept shrubbery, which they called the wilderness, they perceived their son seated on a bench at the end of one of the cross walks, with a book in his hand, and Julia Drummond standing before him, whether listening to his reading aloud, or only looking at him, they could not tell.

"What a peculiarly graceful attitude he has chosen, colonel, hasn't he?" said Mrs. Dermont, pausing for a moment to gaze upon him.

"I will not deny it," returned the colonel, yielding to the pressure on his arm, which was intended to restrain his steps, and looking quite as fondly on the long lounging limbs of his handsome son, as the mother herself could do. "He certainly is the finest fellow of his age that I ever looked at."

"I believe you, my dear," replied his wife, with an expressive smile. "But what

a blessing it is, Colonel Dermont," she continued, "that Julia Drummond is so plain! Don't you observe how constantly they are together? And if she were at all well-looking, or particularly striking in any way, I should be frightened to death lest he should take it into his head to fall in love with her. But, thank goodness, there is no danger of that!"

"It is quite as well, perhaps, that Julia should be plain as handsome," replied the colonel, "because it sets your mind, and it may be my own too, at rest upon that matter. But, between ourselves, wife, Alfred is not a young man to throw his heart away upon any girl who had nothing better to distinguish her than a pretty face. Alfred has an immense deal of proper pride, and you may take my word for it, that he will never dream of making any matrimonial connection that will not satisfy us in every way. I would trust his judgment in all ways before yours or mine."

"I think so, too, colonel. If ever there

was a perfect human being upon the earth, it is our Alfred !” and as she pronounced these truly maternal words, Mrs. Dermont propelled her husband’s footsteps as gently and as effectually, as she had before restrained them, and, in a few minutes, they stood beside their son, with their four fond eyes fixed earnestly upon him.

“ We have followed you to your literary retreat, Alfred, in order to consult you about a little party that your mother is proposing to give,” said Colonel Dermont, laying his hand caressingly on the young man’s shoulder. “ Will you consent to put your book down for a little while to listen to us ?”

“ Here, Julia ! take the book, I have had quite enough of it,” replied the young man, putting the novel, with which he had been beguiling the sultry morning, into the hands of his young companion. “ Now then, ma’am,” addressing his mother, “ what is it you have got to say ?”

“ Do you think you could make room for

us, Alfred? For it is really too hot for any body to stand."

The young man immediately changed his recumbent attitude for one that occupied one-third of the seat, instead of the whole of it, and his father and mother placed themselves beside him, Julia still retaining her standing position in front.

Nothing, however, could be further from the heart of either the colonel or his lady, than any unkind, or even uncivil feeling towards their young ward; but this sort of negligence towards her was become so habitual, as to render it almost impossible that they should treat her otherwise than as a mere child, towards whom any thing in the least degree approaching ceremony would be absolutely ridiculous.

There were many moments in which the young Alfred appeared to be under the influence of the same sort of feeling; but, nevertheless, the truth was, that he was beginning to be annoyed sometimes, if any one, besides himself, treated her too cavalierly;

and, on the present occasion, perceiving that there was no room for her on the bench, he quietly got up, and with a slow, deliberate, and rather languid-seeming step, walked the distance of about a hundred yards to a tree, under which there was a moveable mushroom seat, and passing a finger through the aperture at the top of it, conveyed it, with the same lagging step, to the spot where the group was assembled. He then replaced himself on the bench, and having done so, put down the stool which still hung suspended on his finger, exactly in front of himself, making a silent sign to Julia, that she was to take possession of it. She did so with a short bright glance of gratitude towards her sublime friend ; while Mrs. Dermont said, with a smile, " upon my word, Miss Julia, I think you are highly honoured." A slight frown, the very slightest in the world, passed over the brow of Alfred, and then he said—" Well, ma'am, what is it you have got to tell me ?"

" Why, Alfred," replied his mother, " you

see, my dear, that the weather is most beautifully fine, and I have been thinking that, by way of making a little variety, and trying something new in the manner of receiving our neighbours, we might, if you like it, my dear, give something of a dance upon the lawn—something in the way of a public breakfast, you know. What do you say to it, Alfred?”

“Oh dear, ma’am, I have no objection whatever—provided you can get together people enough. But our lawns are very large, remember, and it will be a very forlorn-looking business if the groups are too thinly scattered.—Should you like it, Julia?”

Both colonel and Mrs. Dermont felt this question to be rather an idle interruption in the discussion of so interesting a subject; but as it came from Alfred, they of course paused till the answer was given; and this did not take long, for Julia replied with great glee, and without pausing for a minute.

“Like it? To be sure I should! I should think it would be the most beautiful

thing in the world ! People dancing upon the lawn ! Oh ! lovely."

" Well, well,—no doubt of it—and now let us think a little about numbers, Alfred," said Mrs. Dermont, " that you must know is the point that puzzles us."

" Unfortunately the people here, for the most part, are horrible bores," said the young man; " that is to say that the women are almost all of them ugly."

" All of them, Alfred ?" said his father, smiling, and holding up his finger. " Have you forgotten the beautiful Miss Thorwold ?"

" No, I have not forgotten her," replied the young man, colouring slightly ; " but I did not know whether she might not be gone before your fête—she is only on a visit you know—if she were to be here—."

" She is to stay the whole year, my dear, I can tell you," said his mother. " Her uncle, Lord Ripley, is to take her to town with him when the parliament meets after Christmas—and then as to numbers, we must do, you know, as all country people are obliged

to do when they give a fête champêtre—we must invite all the best of the Overby people—there is no help for it—we must ask the Overby people.”

“Oh dear, yes!” said the colonel; “we can do so on such an occasion as this without the slightest impropriety. It will not do as a general practice, I know, for country families to make much visiting with the country-town people, it would be breaking down all distinction, but at a great gathering of the natives, such as a christening or coming of age; you hear, on any thing of that sort, all the first nobility of the kingdom invite the people of their country town, and fête champêtre invitations may be quite as general, without giving occasion to any disagreeable observations whatever. Yes, certainly, we must ask the Overby people.”

“I wish you would tell me, ma’am,” said Julia, who had been listening with great attention, “what is the reason why people that live in a country town are not thought fit to visit the people that live outside the

town. I am sure that some of the town children that Alfred and I used to meet at the dancing-school at Overby, were the very best scholars Mr. Laman had, and some of them were so pretty and good-natured?"

"There is no reason in the world, Julia," said Colonel Dermont, in a tone of very philosophical liberality, "no reason whatever, my dear, why the children of persons living in a country town should not be pretty and good-natured. But you must remember, my dear child, that it is the duty of the higher classes of society to keep up the distinctions which it has pleased Providence to make; and gentlemen residing on their estates in the country are quite a different class of people from those who live in the country towns. Perhaps you cannot, as yet, fully understand this."

"Oh! yes!" replied Julia, "I know all about the difference that riches, and high birth, and good education make, and that it is a very mischievous idea to suppose that all the people in the world would be hap-

pier if all these distinctions were removed. Because God himself has made men different in their dispositions, or as to their powers, so that they *must be* in different situations. Miss Harding and Mr. Brown too, used to explain all that to us, and Alfred and I both understood it very well. But it does not seem to me that the impossibility of the country gentlemen visiting the town gentlemen has any thing to do with that."

"Of course, my dear little girl, you can as yet have only learned the great general rules of all organised society. It requires a longer acquaintance with life to become acquainted with what may be called the special regulations of the different classes. But we are too busy for me to enter upon any such explanation just at present. Yet even the business before us, my dear, will give you an opportunity of remarking that there is no want of liberality in *our* notions on the subject. I am clearly of opinion, Alfred, that we may venture to invite poor good Major Murray's two daughters. You know we have had

them here repeatedly, in an evening, already—and then there is the widow of the late vicar, and her pretty daughter. And, if your mother does not object to it, I really don't see why we should not invite Mr., Mrs., and Miss Kersley, and the young attorney—the son I mean—not the other young man who is articled to Mr. Kersley. I don't know any thing about him. Kersley himself is an exceedingly respectable and decent person, and has dined here already, as you all know, over and over again.”

“No, I shall have no objection whatever,” replied Mrs. Dermont; “they are very decent people, all of them—decent, well-behaved people.”

“Decent!—my dear mother,” exclaimed Alfred, raising his eye-brows, “that phrase does not seem to promise much for the elegance of your party.”

“I wish,” said Julia, looking very earnestly in the face of Mrs. Dermont, “I wish you would tell me the real meaning of the word ‘*decent*?’”

"It has more meanings than one, my dear Julia," replied Mrs. Dermont; "but what we mean by it at present is, that the Kersleys are well-looking, well-dressed sort of people, and perfectly respectable in character."

"Oh! not like that second son of Mr. Fitzwarrington, of Warrington Park?" said Julia, nodding her head—"I understand."

Alfred laughed, and said, "What an impertinent little thing you are, Julia."

"What does she mean, Alfred?" said the colonel.

Alfred laughed again. "I suspect, sir," he replied, "that she is alluding to the story she heard Mrs. Beaumont tell the other day, about William Fitzwarrington's having won that horse-race unfairly. I dare say Julia does not think that decent at all—that is what she means."

"That is a foolish play on words, my dear," said Mrs. Dermont, gravely. "It is all very well to make jokes when there is no business going on; but now we really

are busy, so don't interrupt us, Julia, with any more nonsense. If this party is to be given, we must not waste time, I assure you."

"We shall do nothing, mother, without pen, ink, and paper," said Alfred, rising, "so I vote that we adjourn to the library."

Of course this suggestion was immediately complied with, and to the library they went, Alfred leading the way, his father and mother following, and Julia coming after, in obedience to a signal from the young man.

CHAPTER IV.

"Sit down, Julia, and write the names as we call them over," said Mrs. Dermont ; "that is what Alfred says ought to be done first."

Julia obeyed ; and a list of such respectable length was soon produced, as seemed to surprise all the party.

"I had no idea there were so many people in the neighbourhood," said Mrs. Dermont.

"It always turns out so, my dear, when one sets about gathering people together. I suppose Julia is to be secretary in producing the invitations," said the colonel, "and while this is going on, Alfred and I

had better ride over to Overby, if he has no objection, and make a few inquiries of Major Sommerton, respecting the young officers that are quartered at Overby."

The omnipotent Alfred fortunately made no objection, though he curled his handsome lip a little, at the notion of inviting "a parcel of red coats *en masse*." But on his mother's remarking, with a sigh, that disagreeable as this certainly was, it would be impossible to get up a tolerable dancing party without it, the young man, after indulging in another sneer at the possible danger of such promiscuous hospitality, condescendingly assured her that he did not seriously mean to oppose it.

"Write the notes, of course you must, Julia," said he, as he left the library, "but take care, if you please, not to forget that hole in the fishing-net, which I told you to mend for me; it is very possible I may want it to-morrow."

"My dear, dearest Mrs. Dermont," cried Julia, the moment they were left alone,

"will you have the very great kindness to let me do a few minutes' work that I am very anxious about, before I begin writing the notes?—I will write as quick as lightning afterwards."

"Go to work first!—no indeed, Julia, I can't let you do any such thing," replied Mrs. Dermont, with a good deal of severity; "and I really wish you would not be quite so thoughtless. How can any work of yours signify in comparison to these invitations?"

"No, certainly, ma'am," replied Julia, colouring, with eagerness to defend herself from a charge of presumption, of which she would not have been guilty for the world; "it is not for myself, dear Mrs. Dermont, it is something for Alfred;—he has told me to mend his fishing-net."

"I beg your pardon, my dear," replied her protectress; "of course you must do it then; its being for him makes all the difference in the world, you know. But I hope it will not take very long."

Julia promised speed, and kept her word so well, that the net was mended, and all the notes written, before the two gentlemen returned from their ride.

And will not our following some of these notes to their destinations afford an excellent opportunity for introducing some of those who were happy enough to be neighbours to the distinguished family at the Mount?

“A note from the Dermonts, George, for a *déjeuner à la fourchette*, for the 24th,” cried Celestina Marsh, rushing into her brother’s study, with a flushed cheek, and eyes that seemed dancing so joyously, as to run some risk of jumping out of her head.

“I am very glad to hear it, Celestina, for I see it delights you,” replied the gentle personage she addressed, “though I confess I don’t very well know what a *déjeuner à la fourchette* means in England.”

“Nonsense, George!—it means the most delightful sort of entertainment in the world!—dancing, rambling, lounging, rustic and

fanciful ; dressed exactly as much as you please, but with no form or ceremony whatever. It may be made as whimsical and becoming as one likes ; and in short, the whole thing is a species of saturnalia for taste and high spirits. I am enchanted !—and I don't think any thing in the whole world could have pleased me so well ; unless, indeed, it had been an invitation to join in private theatricals, and I rather think that would have been better still. Not that I mean to be discontented, I promise you, with a *fête champêtre*."

While Miss Celestina Marsh was uttering these words, which she did with equal energy and rapidity, her brother gazed upon her with a look of the deepest interest, mingled with a good deal of surprise. "My dearest love," said he, in rather a plaintive tone of voice, "I cannot express my joy !—but I confess, my beloved sister, that I am as much surprised as I am rejoiced. Little did I expect—little did I dare to hope, after our conversation of yes-

terday, that I should so soon see you restored to cheerfulness—to happiness !”

“ Alas! George,” returned the young lady (Miss Celestina Marsh still wanted five months of thirty), “ were it not for the occasional return of my animal spirits, you would not be long condemned to endure any anxiety for me. It has pleased Providence in its mercy, my dear brother,”—and Celestina Marsh drew out her handkerchief as she spoke—“ it has pleased Providence, when bestowing on me the dear but perilous gift of sensibility, to accompany it by a native lightness of heart and elasticity of spirit, which enables me to endure, without sinking, the bitter sorrows you have witnessed!—you must not reproach me with this, my dearest Georgel” she added, pressing her handkerchief to her eyes, “ but on the contrary, you must join with me in hailing every short return of forgetfulness which enables me to endure existence. It is thus only that my life can be saved!”

Hurt beyond measure at having brought

tears to the eyes of his orphan sister, for George and Celestina Marsh had neither father nor mother, the gentle-hearted young man took her hand, and entreated her to be composed. "The greatest wish I have in the world, Celestina," said he, "is to make you happy, and never, never again will I check your innocent cheerfulness by an ill-timed recurrence to feelings less delightful."

These kind and soothing words appeared to produce a healing effect on the agitated spirit of his sister, for she immediately put the handkerchief into her pocket again, and smiled upon him almost as gaily as before she pulled it out. "And who knows, my dearest George," she exclaimed, with renovated glee, "what this delightful *déjeuner* may bring forth?—that Wheeler loves me, I cannot doubt; a hundred, ay, a thousand dear recollections press on my heart at this moment to assure me of it! But, alas! we know too well that the frank-hearted, guileless young man has not sufficient strength of

mind, and firmness of character, to resist the insidious and most wicked blandishments of that shameless flirt, Louisa Morris!—But let us not think of her at this happy moment! Who knows, my dearest George, but that if you can manage to let me have only a tolerably pretty new dress for this occasion, I may be able to bring the dear truant back to his allegiance? You brothers are allowed by all the world to be the worst possible judges of a sister's claims to admiration, but whatever *you* may think of that horrid Miss Morris, I believe there is nobody else who would not allow, that when I am decently well-dressed (which, I confess, happens but seldom), I have no great reason to fear competition with her."

This last hint from Miss Celestina Marsh about her dress, went to the heart of her brother; and why it did so must be explained, in order to make the reader acquainted with the situation of this brother and sister, who are likely to appear frequently before him in the course of my narrative. Mr. Marsh, al-

though but a poor man, was accounted, even by the Dermonts themselves, as fairly ranking among the hereditary gentlemen of the county. His mother's name of Tremayne was considerably more aristocratic than that of his father; and although the estate she brought at her marriage with him was any thing but large, it gave her son and heir the right of being classed among the most respectable of the old county families, and George Tremayne Marsh, of Locklow Wood, although his real revenue (in consequence of a heavy mortgage on his estate) did not exceed five hundred a year, was received everywhere with the consideration always granted to the representative of an old and respectable family. It was much to be lamented that the self-willed young heiress, his mother, had not bestowed herself and her acres better; for the person she married had nothing whatever to recommend him, but a vulgarly handsome face. The son and daughter who have been introduced to the reader, were the only offspring of this marriage. The daugh-

ter, who was by two years the elder, was like her father in person, and her mother in temper—the son was like neither of them, but resembled more the better type of the Tremayne race which had flourished in the olden time. The only symptom of compliance with the wishes of her friends which the late Mrs. Marsh had condescended to show when she married, was the having her property secured by settlement to herself and her heirs; this was done, and with the proviso also, that she might, by will, leave what proportion of it she chose to younger children. Mrs. Marsh survived her husband a few years, and then died intestate, thus leaving her daughter utterly dependant upon her brother.

But no reasonable provision that her mother could have made for her by will, could have given her so large a claim upon the encumbered little estate as did this dependance. Almost in the same hour that George Tremayne Marsh learned that his mother was dead, intestate, and his sister left alone, and

without resources in the mansion that was now become his own, did he set off from Heidelberg, where he had, for some years, been residing upon a hundred pounds a year, amongst learned men and magnificent scenery, in order to cherish and comfort her.

Nature had made this brother and sister marvellously little alike; and this dissimilarity was still further increased by education; for no two processes could be less likely to produce similar effects, than a prolonged tête à tête association with Mrs. Marsh, and a studious residence in a German university. Most fortunate was it for Miss Celestina that her brother was *not* like her; for if he had been, the little income which with such difficulty could be made to support a respectable appearance in the all-too-large old mansion, would not have been so almost wholly devoted to her use. There was a sort of sublime simplicity in the character of George Marsh, which rendered him, in fact, singularly well calculated to become the victim of such a young lady as his sister.

He had found her in what appeared to him the most pitiable condition that a woman could be in—her poverty, however, making by far the least part of her misfortunes in his eyes. But he found her alone, and apparently without a single intimate and attached friend in the world. He found her too, looking much older than he expected, and, despite all the affection which his kind heart yearned to feel for her, he could not help thinking in the very inmost recesses of his secret soul, that she was, take her for all in all, about the least attractive young woman he had ever seen.

In the first place, she could neither sing nor play; and cared no more about either music, poetry, sculpture, painting, or the beauties of nature, than his little dog. And then, in appearance, although it was not absolutely impossible perhaps, that some people might agree with *her* in opinion, rather than with *him*, to his eyes, poor young man, she really appeared one of the plainest females he had ever looked at; for he admired in

woman nothing that was not delicate and *mignonne*, and he found his sister tall, stout, high-coloured, with an immense quantity of coarse black hair, great, bold, staring black eyes, and a long nose, the tip of which was certainly beginning to approach in hue to the bright carnation of her cheeks. But there was not one of these gifts, albeit they certainly seemed to him to be any thing but good, which did not rather increase than diminish his earnest and steadfast resolution to love, to cherish, to comfort, to console her. "Poor, poor Celestina!" he mentally exclaimed, on finding himself alone after his first interview with her in her orphan state, "poor, poor Celestina! what has she to render life happy? What has she to render life endurable to her? She must, by Heaven she *shall*, be my first, and dearest object in existence. Every body else in the world has somebody to love and care for them. But who has this unfortunate Celestina to love and care for her? Other, all other beings have more or less the power to win affec-

tion from their fellow-creatures. But my unhappy sister! Ah! I will devote myself to her. My life shall pass in endeavours to atone to her for the singular combination of adverse circumstances which seem to beset her. Alas! How can my worthless life be better passed?"

Never was a purpose formed from purer motives; nor ever was a purpose kept with more unswerving resolution. It was not long before George Marsh perceived, that in addition to all the sources of sorrow and mortification with which the fate of his poor destitute sister seemed loaded, she had to endure the yet bitterer pangs of disappointed affection. Celestina, with clasped hands and streaming eyes, confessed to her brother, ere they had passed an entire week together, that the tender assiduities of young Ensign Wheeler, who had been quartered during the last two months at Overby, had irrevocably won her affections, and that her only chance of happiness on earth rested on the power and will of him, her dearly beloved

brother, to bring this mutual attachment to a happy issue. Tearful and plaintive as was the tone of this confession, it was very far from adding to the anxieties of George Marsh; on the contrary, her agitated statement of the young ensign's attentions, conveyed a sensation of the truest pleasure to his heart. He thanked Heaven in his very inmost soul, that all men did not see his sister with his eyes, and he promised, with all the energy of his kind nature, that nothing should be wanting on his part to ensure her happiness. But alas! it soon became evident, not only to his own observation, but by the heart-rending confidence of the unhappy Celestina herself, that whatever the attentions of the fickle ensign might once have been, he was now far, oh! very far, from manifesting for her a passion at all equal to that which she still resolutely avowed she felt for him. Some men, under the circumstances, might have doubted the accuracy of the lady's statement respecting the former conduct of the young officer; but

no such doubt ever entered the head of George Marsh for a single instant. George was truth itself in all his thoughts, words, and deeds, and it would have been far easier to teach him the most crabbed new language that ever was invented, than to have so far initiated him in the mysterious characters of falsehood, as to make him doubt a statement deliberately made to him by his sister, and accompanied by the—to him—solemn testimony of sighs and tears.

And then, how poor George's heart ached for her! He knew what love was; for he had loved and lost (by death) a fair young creature, as true and as devoted as himself; and, doubtless, the state of mind in which this event had left him, had much to do with the too yielding indulgence of his conduct towards his sister. Too yielding it certainly was; and this was the reason why her hint about her not being well dressed went so painfully to his heart; for, in truth, her demands upon his purse for the deco-

ration of her person had been answered, during the few months which they had already passed together since the death of their mother, with a liberality much more in proportion to his generous kindness, than to his contracted means. His mother had left many little bills to be paid; and, moreover, he had thought it right to erect a handsome marble tablet to the memory of the last of the Tremaynes of Stoke; so that the first paying for Celestina's deep mourning as well as his own, and the subsequently supplying her with money (over and above her too liberal allowance) for the purchase of what she called *decent half mourning*, had not been done without great difficulty and privation on his part. And therefore it was that the reproach implied by her words pained him a good deal; and something a little like consciousness that he did not deserve it, might have glanced through his mind. But pity chased it before it could take root there, and he immediately an-

swered, "How much money will be necessary for the dress, my dearest Celestina? Indeed I will try to let you have it if I can."

"Why most girls, George, wouldn't manage it under ten pounds, but I'll do it with five, and well too, I'll answer for it," she replied.

"I have not got so much in my pocket, Celestina," he answered with a sigh, which was, however, checked before it was fully breathed; "but to-morrow I think I shall be able to get it for you. I have quite made up my mind to sell my little horse, for I am certainly as well able to walk as you are, and you have got no conveyance, and when Crop is sold, I shall not only have the money for him, but I may sell the little mow of hay too; so you may depend upon having the five pounds, Celestina, either to-morrow or next day, at the very farthest. I will set about it directly."

"Pray let me have it to-morrow, George," returned his sister. "It will be too provoking to waste a whole day when I have

so much to do. Besides, I *must* go to Overby to-morrow, and then I can buy the things at once."

"I will go to Farmer Dawes, and see if I cannot get it directly," said her brother; and without waiting for her reply, he hastened from the room and the house.

CHAPTER V.

THE next invitation we must follow, was addressed to a newly-married couple of the name of Stephens, who, like the inhabitants of Locklow Wood, were among the nearest neighbours to "the Mount." The lady was a person of good fortune—some thirty thousand pounds or so; the gentleman, who was at least twelve years her junior, had little or nothing, save himself, to bestow, in return for the fair hand, the devoted heart, and the handsome portion of the lady.

But, unlike the generality of matches of this class, no disappointment on either side appeared to have followed the nuptials; for the mutual admiration and attachment of

the happy pair for each other increased, as was evident to all who knew them, with every day they lived.

Mr. Stephens, though he had not been fortunate enough to procure any preferment in his profession, was a clergyman, and at the time when he was so happy as to meet with his wife, had been looking about for a curacy, upon which, together with the income arising from his fellowship, it was his intention to exist. Greatly, however, did he prefer the different mode of life pointed out to him by the lady whose affections he was so lucky as to captivate. She did not like a curacy; and still less of course, did she like that the man she adored should continue to pine in the heartless solitude of a fellowship. So they were married after an acquaintance of about six weeks, and reading in the *Times* newspaper an advertisement of an "elegant residence" to be let in the county of —, near the important market town of Overby, they came, looked at, and hired it, with a celerity equal

to that with which they had taken a lease of each other for life. Beech-hill was a small, but rather pretty-looking place, and as it had always been included in the list of mansions forming "the neighbourhood," its being taken by a clergyman, who immediately laid out several hundred pounds in embellishments, naturally secured its being so still—and, indeed, every body said that they might consider themselves very lucky, in these shop-keeping days, to have Beech-hill taken by such "nice people"—for nice people every body seemed determined to find them.

Mr. and Mrs. Stephens had already dined twice at the Mount, though their own dining-room being still unfinished had prevented their giving any party in return; and they were both greatly pleased by the flattering hospitality which thus again solicited their company at the principal place in the neighbourhood.

Here again were a pair, insignificant enough, perhaps, as to the position they held in that world of fashion, which so

liberally offers to the historian of *life* all that it has of richest and rarest, wherewith to adorn his pages. But notwithstanding the comparative insignificance of Mr. and Mrs. Stephens, when considered in relation to this said world of fashion, they were very far, indeed, from being insignificant in the world of Stoke; and as that is the region wherein for the present we are about to linger, I shall take the liberty of endeavouring to make the reader acquainted with them. Would that I could hope this acquaintance would prove as interesting to this dear reader, as it has proved to me! But if I fail in this, I must console myself by remembering, like La-fontaine,

“ Que si de l'agr  er je n'emporte pas le prix,
J'aurais ou moins l'honneur de l'avoir entrepris.”

Mr. and Mrs. Stephens, if not what can properly be called people of fashion, were, as they could have themselves told you, something a great deal better—they were people of superior minds—they were people of the very highest order of intelligence; and this,

not in the mere ordinary walks of literature, wherein we may often see many clever kinds of people wandering and enjoying themselves, not one of whom could be compared in sublimity of mental elevation to either Mr. or Mrs. Stephens. It was the sympathy of their minds in this respect which rendered their union one of such very-much-out-of-the-common-way harmony.

In the first instance, indeed, it is possible that the attraction which brought them together might have arisen, on his part, from the pleasure of finding a lady, known by all the world to be in the possession of thirty thousand pounds, so very obligingly ready to listen to all he had to say—while on hers, the finding herself more noticed at thirty-five, than any other young lady of her acquaintance, by a tolerably well-looking young man of twenty-three and a-half, might have been sufficient to produce those gentle accents and gentler glances, which led to the thrice happy marriage that followed. But once united, once brought together within

reach of the daily and hourly intercourse of souls, their mutual attachment became such as can only be the result of the sublimest species of intellectual sympathy.

To watch these two minds, as I have done, each waiting, amidst all the frivolities of ordinary society, for the ethereal sparks which they knew *must* come from the other—to watch them waiting, and not in vain—to mark the fond welcoming glance of admiration with which these confidently looked-for scintillations were received, now by the one, and now by the other, is truly one of the most delicious occupations in the world! But the gratification arising from such a spectacle as this, cannot be described, it must be felt, in order to be understood; and all I can do towards making my readers share in the pleasure I have received from a tolerably intimate acquaintance with Mr. and Mrs. Stephens, is to relate from time to time some of the charming anecdotes, and repeat some of the beautiful sentiments and opinions which I have seen and heard.

There is, however, one thing respecting them which a love of truth leads me frankly to mention at once, in preference to leaving the discovery of it to the sagacity of the reader. Mrs. Stephens was an Unitarian, and I believe it cannot be doubted by those well acquainted with this peculiarly well-matched pair, that Mr. Stephens (notwithstanding his profession) is now a good deal inclined to the same faith. I am not an Unitarian myself, and I do not scruple to confess that I am not very much disposed to tolerate this schism cordially in others. But the admiration I have so freely expressed above, for Mr. and Mrs. Stephens, ought to be received as a proof that I am not *unreasonably* the reverse.

“*A déjeuner à la fourchette* is a very pretty thing, my dear William, if it be well done,” said Mrs. Stephens, as she folded up the note which contained their acceptance of the agreeable invitation. “But do you know, I am rather sorry they have thought of it, for it is exactly the thing I have been plan-

ning in my own head for us to give. It is a little out of the common way, and it won't do for us, you know, to give our first party quite in the jog-trot old fashioned dinner style. Not to mention that I particularly wish to give a party that shall include every body at once. It is so much more economical."

"To be sure it is, my sweetest Arabella!—and it is really very provoking that you should be forestalled thus."

"Never mind, dearest!—Depend upon it I shall find that they do not do the thing in my way—and if I am right in this, a second *déjeuner à la fourchette* may be given in the parish of Stoke, with very good effect."

"If you arrange it, sweetest, its effect cannot fail," replied her adoring young husband. But almost before the words were uttered, an anxious shadow seemed to rest upon his brow, and taking her hand, he added in a whisper—"Remember our hopes, sweetest!—promise me that you will not exert yourself too much!"

She patted his cheek, and playfully replied, "Silly man!—I will take care of myself, depend upon it."

He pressed her hand to his heart—rang the bell, and despatched the answer to the Mount.

This done, the lady unlocked the carefully-closed drawer of her little work-table, and drew thence some small work which seemed to be of a very delicate texture, and which had this of peculiar about it, that neither canvass, nor worsted, gold thread, nor steel beads, made any part of it; to this little work she now devoted herself most assiduously.

"Delicious spectacle!" murmured Mr. Stephens, looking at her for a moment with inconceivable tenderness. "And I will read to you the while!"

She nodded her head in smiling and affectionate approval, and after holding up before his eyes, with an air half bashful, half playful, a morsel of fine linen, which she was fashioning into something which appeared

greatly to interest them both, she put on her thimble, and again began to sew.

And then, having breathed a soft sigh, and once more murmured the word, "Sweetest!" Mr. Stephens took his paper-knife, and began to cut open the pages of a volume, which had just arrived, among other similar treasures, from America.

"What a luxury it is, my dearest Arabella," said he, after he had been thus occupied for a minute or two. "What an invaluable luxury it is to us, with our insatiable appetites for literature, this being able to get all the new American publications at such a very trifling expense! Your acquaintance with that American captain is a blessing beyond all price. And that admirable idea of yours, of sending a few pages about fashionable life in England to his wife, every time his vessel returns, is evidently considered as a most ample payment. I would make you any bet, sweetest, that every word you write, all invented as it is, out of your own dear clever head, appears in all the fashion-

able newspapers in the Union, and in point of fact, it does exactly as well for them, you know, as if you were really living in the midst of the court circle. And if so, love! where is the harm of this little fraud?"

"I hope it does please them, William," replied Mrs. Stephens, in a conscientious tone of voice, "for I should be extremely sorry to give Captain Vondersmutch the trouble of bringing us over a packet of books every time he comes, without repaying him for it in some way. And, as at present, I certainly feel that by much our highest duty, is the taking care that no thoughtless extravagance of ours shall injure the dear unborn creature, whose welfare is so inexpressibly dear to us both, I feel bound in duty to exert my ingenuity—nor can I call this a fraud."

"It is impossible, sweetest, that there can be a second opinion between us on that point; and this is precisely the reason why I so highly value the good offices of Captain Vondersmutch. It would be morally im-

possible, sweetest, that you and I, with our minds, could exist without a constant supply of new books. And what on earth would become of us, were we obliged to indulge this intellectual craving, by purchasing new *English* works, from an *English* bookseller?"

"It could not be thought of, *Liebe*," replied Mrs. Stephens, who, amongst her other accomplishments, had once studied the German language for six weeks; and it spoke well for the tender softness of her nature, that the only word which still rested on her memory with sufficient distinctness to be useful, was that which she now used in addressing her young husband. "It could not be thought of, *Liebe*," she replied, "and whatever intellectual pangs we might have suffered from the want of new books, we must, perforce, have endured them, had no dear, good Captain Vondersmutch come to our relief. For after all, William, you may depend upon it, that the feelings of a mother are the most powerful of our nature! Thou

wilt not chide me for this thought, Liebe, wilt thou?"

Mr. Stephens felt, that at such a moment of excitement as this, a tender caress must be expected, as the only suitable reply that could be offered by a fond husband to so enchanting a wife. He therefore laid down his new book, and he laid down his paper-knife upon it, and then opening wide his arms as he rose from his chair, he closed them not till Mrs. Stephens was within them, and then he pressed her to his bosom, and gave her a most tender kiss. This done, he returned to his comfortable arm-chair—for since his marriage, Mr. Stephens had always sat in a very comfortable arm-chair—and having resumed his occupation, spoke as follows; his wife holding her needle suspended the while, to listen to him.

"There is still another reason, sweetest, why we should be grateful to your excellent friend, Captain Vondersmutch, and that is, that without his aid, it would be absolutely impossible, let us spend as much

money as we would, for us to find ourselves so much in advance of our age, as we do at present. Who is there, among the whole circle of our acquaintance, who is acquainted with United States' literature as we are? Not a single individual, Arabella, not one! There is but one reason, in my opinion, which can satisfactorily account for the unnatural degree of indifference manifested in Europe, for the literary compositions of the new world. It is jealousy; trust me, it is jealousy, and nothing else. We know that they are our superiors in freedom of thought, in boldness of principle, and in originality of expression. Fine spirits produce fine issues, my Arabella—can we wonder then, at the thoughts of these unshackled freemen—free in every sense of the word—free in politics—free in elections—free in religion. And free too, beyond all the nations of the earth, upon that stiff-necked point of the moral code, which absurdly brands as dishonesty, what is, in fact, the legitimate offspring of necessity. For how, in Heaven's name, is

any man, or any body of men, to pay money when they have not got it to pay? Must not all reasoning, founded on such a theory as this, prove a mixture of false logic, and false principle? How perfectly superior are American citizens, Arabella, to the production of either the one or the other! Yes, sweetest! Fine spirits produce fine issues. You may look for this always; and I will venture to predict, that you will never be disappointed."

"Ah, Liebe!" returned his wife, looking at him with a face full of meaning. "Oh, Liebe! when will you honestly confess to me, that you can trace both the fine spirits, and the fine issues which proceed from them, to the absence of the degrading religious superstitions which disgrace our country? and, which once, as you cannot deny, disgraced yourself?"

"My dearest love, I should be ready to confess it to-morrow, were it not that I perfectly well know we should lose consideration in this neighbourhood, and in fact, in

society generally, were I to throw aside the title of reverend, and proclaim myself openly a seceder from the church of England. Besides, sweetest, the treasure yet unborn, might find my doing so a disadvantage. How could we possibly ask any person of consequence to stand godfather, or god-mother, to our child? Think of this, beloved one! and then blame me, if you can."

"There is something in that, Liebe," returned Mrs. Stephens; and she dropped the subject—requesting him without further delay, to begin reading the book she was longing for!

CHAPTER VI.

THE next of the Dermont invitations whose reception I shall record was delivered at what was decidedly the most *comfortable* house in the neighbourhood. This may sound like very homely praise, and may perhaps lead the thoughtless, or over-fine, to fancy that Mrs. Verepoint, and her daughter Charlotte, lived in a warm, but small parlour, enjoying a southern aspect and no smoke; but without any pretensions to be classed among the beau-monde of the county. But any person drawing this conclusion from my word comfortable, would blunder egregiously. I have mentioned as one of the happy circumstances in the situation of the Dermont

family, that their greatness was overshadowed by no towering nobles near them ; but this though strictly true, does not prevent its being equally so that old Mrs. Verepoint and her young daughter had good blood in their veins; and though our nameless county was neither Westmoreland nor Cumberland there was, nevertheless, an old stone escutcheon over the door of entrance, on which might be traced the annulets which have for so many ages belonged to their race. The good lady herself, too, was descended from a long line of Norman ancestors, and though much too sensible a woman to suffer any feeling of family pride to make itself visible through the bland, kind-tempered suavity of her perfectly well-bred manner, there was about her a sort of high chivalresque aristocracy, which was to her pure morality, what a brilliant setting is to a precious gem, it could not add to its intrinsic worth, but it showed the value in which it was held, and decidedly increased the care that was taken of it.

Her daughter, Charlotte, was a very pretty creature, and as like her mother as it was possible for a girl of twenty to be like a woman of fifty; moreover she was the heiress *par excellence* of the neighbourhood. Yet still, the long-descended acres which, together with the continuance of the old name to which they belonged, were to be hers at the death of her mother, were not of sufficient extent to compromise the superiority of Colonel Dermont; for whereas his land happily produced him an annual return of three thousand eight hundred per annum, Mrs. Verepoint's estate, which bore the old-fashioned appellation of "The Grange," never produced above two thousand. Had it not been for this inferiority of rent-roll, it would, to say the truth, have been impossible for either colonel or Mrs. Dermont to have loved and admired their neighbours at "The Grange" so cordially as they certainly did; but as it was, they certainly stood in higher favour with the family at the Mount, than any other in the whole list of their visiting

acquaintance, and it is impossible to give a greater proof of this, than the fact that the colonel and his lady, had more than once, when in sacred *tête-à-tête* discussion on the future destinies of their matchless son, confessed to each other that they should be by no means displeased, if it happened that Alfred took a fancy to her, to receive Charlotte Verepoint as his wife.

To return, however, to the homely epithet of "comfortable," by which I have taken the liberty of describing the residence of Mrs. Verepoint and her daughter, I must beg to prove its correctness, endeavouring to give some idea of the place; it shall be done as briefly as I can, good reader—but I must describe it, because I have seen it so often, loved it so well, and remember it so distinctly.

The first peculiarity of the old mansion was its being surrounded on three sides, that is to say, on the north, east, and west, by a grove of ancient oak trees, which spoke as plainly as the one bit of parchment which con-

stituted all its title deeds, the antiquity of the venerable domicile. It was well perhaps for the tranquillity of good Colonel Dermont's mind, that he had no judgment as to the age of oak-trees when he looked at them, and he therefore felt no ancestral pangs at his heart, when comparing the sycamore, beech, and acacia groves which surrounded his own gay-looking mansion with the rich Druidical sort of solemnity that enveloped the dark gray abode of his quiet neighbour.

But this dark gray abode, had an old long library at the back of it, with three old-fashioned bay windows looking out upon a well-shaven lawn, that had been stolen from the oaks by the father of the late Mr. Verepoint. No later alterations however, had been made upon it. It was not cut up for flower-beds or flower-baskets, but stretched its green carpet on all sides, exactly as far as the majestic oaks would permit ; the pleasure paths, which wandered away in various

directions among them not being visible from the windows of the library.

But delicious both in winter and summer as was the solemn stillness of this venerable grove, the room itself would have been far less "comfortable" had not a broad vista, cut through it towards the west, let in upon its windows the warmth and the glory of the setting sun. At the west side of each bay window was a flourishing myrtle-tree, which rarely required any warmer winter clothing than the dead leaves the sheltering oaks afforded. None but very young gardeners fancy that the sunshine of a southern exposure is favourable to their pets. The protection of such a grove, as I have described, is a thousand-fold more salutary.

All libraries are *comfortable*, unless they are absurdly unlibrary-like, which Mrs. Verepoint's was not; and therefore I shall say no more about it, but immediately go up stairs to the drawing-room, for the mansion was old enough to have "its *upper* rooms swept and

garnished" for the reception of company. The aspect of this room was due south, and the view it looked upon was such as the eye of modern taste would condemn as "hideous;" for the only alteration that had been made during the last two hundred and fifty years in the old paved court in front, was the contriving to make a carriage entrance at the side, which enabled the comers and goers to enter in that commodious invention, a coach, without having to walk a distance of two hundred yards from the pomegranites which were trained on each side of the door steps, to the two great bay trees that stood beside the stately stone pillars, supporting the enormous iron gates at the entrance. This alteration was very *comfortable*, but the aspect of the approach was very little changed thereby; for the road leading from the outrageously lofty old arch at the entrance of the little porch, to the iron gates above-mentioned, was still as straight as the flight of an arrow, and the stone-paved court itself, extending across the whole front of

the house, notwithstanding the massive and handsome granite balustrade which surrounded it, was likely enough to appear to most people as little picturesque as possible.

But those who found no pleasure in looking out of the windows, could hardly fail of finding consolation if they looked within; for they would find there books and flowers, and easy chairs, and soft sofas, and sliding tables, that would either fly at a touch, or stand steadily on all their legs at once, and plenty of foot-stools, and chessmen, and cards, and miniatures, and annuals, and albums, and shade and mignonette in summer, and a good fire and a folding screen in winter, and a good grand piano-forte, and a fine old violin into the bargain, and a space of forty feet long, which by its height and width produced a double cube. Such was the room; and an elderly lady whose sweet voice spake cordial welcome on one side of it, and a pretty girl smiling an echo to it on the other; and all this was exceedingly comfortable, to say the very least of it. But in case I have

not already sufficiently proved the claims of Mrs. Verepoint's mansion to this pleasant epithet, I must beg leave to say a word or two of the dining-parlour. This was immediately under the drawing-room, but was neither so long nor so high. It was, however a capital dining-room, and capital were the frequent little small party dinners that were given there. Excepting the fine old plate on the sideboard, there was, however, less of display at Mrs. Verepoint's dinners than at any other in the neighbourhood; but then at no other house was every thing so peculiarly good of its kind; nowhere were the viands served so hot with plates to match them, nowhere were sauces so perfect, nowhere were the wines so old, nowhere was the attendance so carefully proportioned to the number to be waited on, and nowhere was there such an absence of cold wind in winter, or intrusive sunbeams in summer; and, moreover, the room was so thickly carpeted, up to the very edges on all sides, that the most creaking shoe that ever footman

wore might walk about with impunity. Now all this I consider as very comfortable, and for this reason gave I this unassuming epithet to Mrs. Verepoint's house.

"This is something quite new, mamma," said the young lady on being made acquainted with the contents of the note. "How do you think you shall like it?"

"It will depend a good deal upon the weather, Charlotte," replied Mrs. Verepoint, "if they are lucky enough to have a fine day, I think it may be very pleasant."

"I rather wonder, they did not postpone so great a novelty till next year," said Charlotte, "when the son and heir will be of age. Alfred Dermont, you know, is exactly two months older than I am."

"There is something rather sentimental, Charlotte, in the sound of that observation," said her mother; "and, by the way, it reminds me of what Mrs. Beaumont said yesterday, which I had quite forgotten to tell you. She called, you know, while you were riding; and she entertained me during half

the time she staid, by repeating all the news her son had heard at Overby the day he dined there. She says it is universally reported, that you are going to be married to Colonel Dermont's son," said Mrs. Verepoint.

"I do not think the report can be fairly termed universal, mamma," returned her daughter; "because I do not think that either you or I have said any thing about it. At least, I am sure I can answer for myself."

Her mother laughed. "Then you honestly confess the truth of it, my dear?" said she, "only you have not talked about it."

"Pray, mamma, spare my blushes!" cried Charlotte, concealing her pretty face with her hand.

"You are a spoiled child, Charlotte," said the mother, "or you would not venture to jest upon so serious a subject with me. You know, as well I do, my dear, that Mr. Alfred Dermont may be considered as about the best match in the county, and I do really believe, that many of our neighbours think you are to marry him."

“ To tell you the truth, mamma, I do not very well see how we can help marrying,” replied Charlotte. “ You say that he is the best match in the county. Old Hannah is constantly saying the same of me. That clearly proves that we should be a proper match for each other. Next, we were born in the same parish, nay, in the same year; does not that prove that we were matched in Heaven? And now you have completed a triad of reasons for our being united, by telling me that I am a spoiled child. Is not the handsome Alfred a spoiled child too? And are not these, altogether, quite reasons enough for us to set about being married as quickly as possible?”

“ Why, to tell you the truth, Charlotte, I think one of the resemblances you mention, is greatly against the match! I think you are four or five years too old for him,” said Mrs. Verepoint.

“ Oh! cruel mother!” exclaimed Charlotte. “ What a moment you have chosen for reproaching me with my age! And you

really think, then, that I ought to give up all hopes of marrying Alfred Dermont?"

"I am not quite sure about it," returned her mother, gravely. "But, at least, I am fully prepared to assure you, that if this be *not* an objection, I really am not aware that there is any whatever."

"Indeed!" said Charlotte; "sits the wind in that quarter, mother?"

"Of course, my dear, I speak with very little serious meaning, as I have no reason whatever to believe, that any such idea has ever entered the heads of our good friends at the Mount," returned her mother.

"Well, mamma, I confess, I think that is rather a reason against our settling the affair any further. Nevertheless, mother mine, I presume you do not mean to refuse this *déjeuner à la fourchette*?"

"Most assuredly not, my daughter—for I think it will be both new and agreeable," said Mrs. Verepoint.

"Well then, mamma, if you decide upon going, I have a great favour to ask of you."

"Speak on, Charlotte. What is it?"

"Of course, you know, the invitations will include all the neighbourhood, and it has come into my head, that poor Miss Marsh will be greatly at a loss how to get there."

"And you want me to take her, I suppose?" said Mrs. Verepoint. "It is very good-natured of you, Charlotte, to think of it, and the more so because you do not like her—and I shall have no objection I am sure. She certainly could not walk, and I fear it is only too certain, that her poor brother would hardly be justified in hiring a carriage to take her. I only wish that it were not so much out of the way. We shall have to go over exactly two sides of a triangle, you know."

"Nay, mamma, but if you do it at all, I want you to do it with more effectual kindness than that. I want you to ask them to dine here the day before, and then Sophy can dress Miss Celestina's hair for her, and prevent her looking such a preposterous figure, as she generally does."

“Upon my word, Charlotte, that is being very good-natured indeed, and I confess I think it will be a prodigious bore, to be followed about all day, by that particularly disagreeable young woman. For, of course, if she is to be staying here, and go with us, she will consider herself as being of our party.”

Charlotte was silent for a moment, before she answered, and then said, “I don’t think she would trouble us much. However, if it will be disagreeable to you to grant my request, dear mother, I withdraw it.”

“No, no, you shall not withdraw it, Charlotte—for you are right, and I am wrong. I will only make one condition in granting it, which is, that if we have the sister, we should have the brother too. I like him as much as I dislike her ; so I will myself write a note to desire they will both come to us the day before, and remain with us till the day after the *fête*. But this does not seem to please you, my dear. You look exactly as if you were going to cry about it.

If I did not know you too well, to believe you could be so *missish*, I might really suppose, that you had some scruples about having such an undashing squire in your train. Is it any such thought as this, which has clouded the serenity of your brow, Charlotte?"

Miss Verepoint coloured so violently upon being asked this question, that her mother could not help suspecting that she had touched the right chord, and felt a little vexed that her high-minded and unsophisticated daughter could be affected by so contemptible a feeling; and then, rather thinking aloud, than intending to express the thought, she added, "But, I suppose all girls must have, more or less, of this paltry feeling, till they have lived long enough to look out on life sufficiently to comprehend, and appreciate, the stuff of which their fellow-creatures are made."

The thought itself, or the manner in which it was worded, seemed either to please, or arouse the young lady; for the

shade passed from her brow, and she smiled with all her usual gaiety of expression, as she replied, "I believe girls are great fools, mamma, in a hundred ways ; but I do not choose you should delude yourself as to the nature of my particular folly, and therefore I beg leave to observe, that I am a vast deal more likely to remember, that the blood of the Tremaynes can be traced to a more ancient date than that of the blooming Captain Smith, or the exquisitely elegant Lieutenant Tomkins, than that George Marsh's black coat is beginning to look a little rusty."

"I am glad to hear it, Charlotte," returned her mother ; forgetting, in the pleasure of listening to so very congenial a sentiment, the still unexplained cloud which had passed over the sweet face of her daughter.

"Now, then, to our pens," continued Mrs. Verepoint, rising, and approaching the commodious table, which accommodated the well-appointed drawing-room writing desks

of herself and her daughter. "You, Charlotte, shall write the note of acceptance to Mrs. Dermont's invitation, and I, that of invitation to the Marshes."

CHAPTER VII.

As to all the other threescore and ten invitations which were scattered far and wide in all directions within the county of —, I will not trouble either my reader or myself by dwelling on them. I have already given, what I flatter myself will be found very graphic descriptions of the effect produced by those addressed to the three nearest neighbours of the Dermont family; and this must suffice as an introduction to their society for the present. In point of vicinity, indeed, the honoured individuals selected from the town of Overby might raise a fair claim to competition with both Locklow Wood and the Grange; but I feel quite

certain that, were I to trust myself among my well-remembered old acquaintances, the Murrays, the Morrisises, and the Kersleys of Overby, I should fill a very unreasonable number of pages in describing them. One little observation, from the youngest daughter of the half-pay veteran, Major Murray, I will give, because it conveys in a short space a just and general idea of the tone of feeling which existed between the county and the county town.

"Here is a marvel!" exclaimed the eldest sister, entering the apartment of the younger, with Mrs. Dermont's invitation in her hand. "What wonderful miracle have the sun, moon, and stars been performing for us? Look you here, Miss Janet! An invitation to a *déjeuner à la fourchette*, from those greatest of all grandees, the Dermonts! What can have produced this extraordinary condescension?"

"Charming!" exclaimed the youngest sister. "And won't I dance with Captain Waters! But as to the miraculous part of

the business, I can explain it in a moment, and most satisfactorily. You know that three-cornered bit of ground by the side of the kitchen door, which was formerly entirely devoted to the drying of Old Maggy's pans and platters? During your visit to Aunt Macfarlane, I coaxed papa into making over to me the fee simple of that part and parcel of his Overby estate. And if you, Miss Kattie, had not been so altogether occupied by the tender attentions of Ensign Jones, from the very first day of your return to the present hour, you would have perceived—which I know you have not—that I have given to the domain such an air of rurality, by the wall-flowers, sweet peas, and double stocks, which are flourishing there, as, I have long thought, ought to secure our being classed as a *county family*, instead of leaving us still included in the fatal phrase of '*Overby people*.' I am happy to see that my improvements have produced their proper effect ; and I hope you feel grateful to me for having relieved you from the mar-

ket-town odium, from which not even the name of Murray could save you."

* * * * *

In fact, such an invitation as that which had issued from the Mount, was not likely to be met in any quarter by a refusal; and when the arithmetical process of counting noses had been carefully performed, which it was in succession by all the members of the Mount family, Julia Drummond included, it became rather alarmingly evident that there was no room in the house, notwithstanding its very handsome proportions, which could permit the whole party to sit down together to the banquet.

The drawing-room, indeed, might from its width, have admitted a double row of tables, each long enough to accommodate about forty persons; but when this was suggested by the two young people, the colonel and his lady both started as if a bucket of cold water had been thrown over them. Had the proposal proceeded from Julia alone, it would probably have been treated

as a symptom of incipient delirium, consequent upon the fever excited by the prospect of the fête, and she might possibly have been sent to bed, with a cup of water-gruel and a few grains of antimony; but the companionship of Alfred saved her from this; and the enormity of introducing preparations for positive substantial eating, with all the atrocious accompaniments of flying champagne corks, possible spillings of claret, and the like, into the most elegant drawing-room in the county, was only treated as a gay effusion, indulged in by the young people as a joke.

Colonel and Mrs. Dermont, indeed, exchanged a glance, in which something like horror might have been seen to mingle; but they speedily recovered themselves, and replied at the same moment, and almost in the same words, that it was no good to joke about it, but that very seriously they must contrive some plan or other by which at least all the ladies, and a portion of the gentlemen, could be accommodated with seats.

Alfred laughed, and Julia coloured at perceiving how very little their proposal was approved; but Colonel Dermont prevented the probable efforts on the part of the young gentleman to defend it, by saying eagerly, "I will tell you what we must do, and I only wonder that it did not occur to me at first. When it was feared that the riotous propensities of some of our neighbours were likely to lead to serious risings, orders were forwarded to the troops at Overby and two or three other towns near us, to prepare for an encampment on Sunbury Common. I know that all the marquees are ready, and the best thing we can do will be to borrow Major Sommerton's, and one or two others from Captain Waters, perhaps, or Captain Smith. Nothing looks so gay and picturesque as tents pitched upon a lawn; and with the military band stationed among the trees to the left, the effect will be beautiful."

The whole party agreed that it was the very cleverest thought in the world; and another expedition was immediately planned

for the two gentlemen to Overby, to open a negotiation with the commanding officer for the marquees and the music.

Even if Colonel Dermont had not been *the* Colonel Dermont, who had so much distinguished himself in India as to have been very nearly killed, Major Sommerton, as well as every officer under his command, would have been only too happy to do all they could to promote so very agreeable a scheme; but, as it was, the whole thing was received with a degree of enthusiasm which was exceedingly gratifying to the dignified proprietor of the Mount, and the consequence was, that on his part, as well as on that of his ever sympathising lady, exertions were made to render the fête one of the most brilliant ever witnessed in the neighbourhood. Preparations upon a large scale can never be made in so quiet a region as Stoke, without creating a strong sensation in the public mind. Expectation was on tiptoe. Mr. Sims, the principal farmer on the estate, was deputed by his neighbours to petition that the

wives and families of the tenants might have leave to place themselves within the park gates, that they might witness the arrival of the company; which permission being most graciously accorded, the price of ribbons and paper flowers rose considerably at Overby; nor was Miss Celestina Marsh the only one of the invited guests who intended to make a point of spending a little more than she ought, in order to do honour to the generous givers of so brilliant an entertainment.

Another result of the convulsion of spirits into which the whole country side was thrown by this remarkable event, was a wonderful variety of divinations as to the cause which had produced it. Some were strongly of opinion that it was given in compliment to Lady Ripley's niece, the beautiful Miss Thorwold, whose charms had produced so evident an effect on the young heir of the Mount at the last Overby assize ball. Another party had their own particular reasons for believing that the fête was given for the purpose of publicly announcing to the neigh-

bourhood the engagement of Alfred Dermont and Charlotte Verepoint—which had, in fact, been settled between the parents, they said, from within a few months of the birth of the children. But all this was only county talk. The gossips of the town said they knew better, and that the only reason why “the Dermonts” were going to give an entertainment so much out of the common way of their very regularly organised hospitality was, that they might receive all the officers together, and that in a manner that would be sure to please them—which every body knew would not be the case (the Overby young ladies observed), if an entertainment were given to them in the usually exclusive style of county visiting, as every body knew there was not a single officer in the corps—excepting Major Sommerton, who was as formal as a judge, and any thing but young,—who had not lost his heart to an Overby beauty.

In short, the conversations which began and ended, without involving a discussion on the

approaching fête at the Mount, during the fortnight which preceded it, were confined, solely and wholly, to the itinerant beggars who were prevented by the local authorities from remaining long enough in the neighbourhood to learn even the names of the inhabitants. Every thing went on smoothly. The ladies, and the ladies' maids, the little mantua makers and the small milliners, all seemed absolutely inspired. The lightest and most becoming caps, were made to simulate the out-of-door costume of hats, while transparent bonnets mimicked the wings of the gossamer, and floating gauze enveloped pretty shoulders like a mantle, without doing any mischief to their beauty at all.

The only *contretemps* of any great importance which occurred in the whole neighbourhood, was the unexpected arrival of a guest at the house of Mr. Stephens. The first thought, both of that gentleman and of his lady, when this visiter arrived was, that this very untoward circumstance would prevent their participating in the festivities to

which they, as well as their less philosophical neighbours, had been looking forward with extraordinary satisfaction. But when they retired to arrange their dresses for dinner, Mrs. Stephens announced to her husband in a tone of very firm decision, that she was quite determined not to lose the fête.

Mr. Stephens sighed. "Well, then, sweetest!" he replied, in gentle accents, "well then!—you must order a comfortable little dinner for me and Mr. Holingsworth, and we must console ourselves during your absence as well as we can."

"You quite mistake me, Liebe," returned the newly-married wife. "How could you imagine for a moment, that I could find pleasure where thou wert not?—No, no; my scheme is a very different one. I neither intend to give up the party myself, nor to leave you out of it, Liebe; but I intend to drive over to the Mount to-morrow morning, in order to inform the family of the arrival

of our guest, and to obtain an invitation for him."

"Indeed!" cried Mr. Stephens, looking a little frightened—for the early habits of Mr. Stephens had not been such as to render him familiar with much society, and this proposal struck him as being more courageous than prudent; a feeling which he did not scruple to confess, adding as a reason for it, "You know, sweetest, that they are considered as the proudest people in the county."

"That others may find them so, is likely enough, Liebe," returned Mrs. Stephens, with a charming smile; "but there are two or three reasons, you know, why there is no great danger that any such feeling should be exhibited to me. Every one knows, I presume, that my paternal inheritance was rather a remarkably large one; a circumstance which I fear in our degenerate days disposes the world in general to be only too much at our feet; and though I am aware,"—and here Mrs. Stephens cast her eyes

upon the floor—"and though I am aware, Liebe, that I have been, and still may be, blamed by the sordid and narrow-minded multitude for having selected you from out the world as the dear companion and sharer of my wealth, I shall ever feel that the peculiarly exalted intellectual tie which unites us (without alluding to the more ordinary sources of passion, which of course we feel in common with others), I shall ever, I say, feel that this unison of two souls who have both drunk deeply, as we have done, at the eternal fountain of philosophy, has rendered our union as much a source of mutual pride, as of mutual happiness. And therefore, I fear not in any society to assert the species of pre-eminence to which I was born, nor shall I ever scruple to take those little social liberties with my neighbours, which are permitted to people of consequence, though denied to others."

This exalted manner of speaking and thinking was not now displayed for the first time to the admiring eyes of the favoured

and happy husband; and he therefore only seized the lady's hand and kissed it, without saying any thing in reply beyond his usual gentle phrase, "Do just as you will with me, sweetest."

At breakfast on the following morning, Mrs. Stephens took occasion to mention to their friend Mr. Holingsworth, who was an American of great literary endowments, recently arrived from the United States, both the brilliant fête which was about to take place, and her purpose of paying a visit at the house where it was to be given, in order to obtain an invitation for him.

"And that is a very obliging notion I expect, madam, and I hold it to be very handsome of you," replied Mr. Holingsworth. "Yet I can't but opinionate, too," he added, after a moment's reflection, "that it would be a better scheme still for us to start off, all of us together, for the object of getting the invite. I most times remark that we Yankees carry with us a good deal of influence, and I guess that the seeing and

hearing the individual what is to be invited, when characteristics all convene, as on the present occasion, as may be spoken, I calculate, without vanity, is the style most likely to obtain the end proposed. And if this should be approbated by you, madam, and prove in conclusion as much your sentiment as it is my own, I should beg leave to propose that you introduce me forthwith to the genteel friends you speak of. Always supposing that my honourable friend, Mr. William Stephens here, sees no objection."

Mrs. Stephens was somewhat of a leohunting personage in a small way; and as she had never chanced to have the good fortune of introducing either a Turk, a Laplander, or even a Greek to any of her friends, though she was too well-informed a person not to know that it was extremely genteel to do so; it suddenly struck her that, as they were not in London, but in quite a remote country place, she might take the tone of conferring a favour, instead of asking one; and with this clever device in her

thoughts, she immediately answered, with a most amiable smile, "Your proposal is a great improvement upon mine, Mr. Holingsworth, and as to my excellent husband, you will learn, when you have seen a little more of us, that he knows not what it is to have a wish or a will, save as he receives both from the eyes of her he loves."

"Possible?" returned the naïve American; who, though a married man himself, uttered the word in an accent that certainly expressed surprise.

However, Mr. Stephens most frankly corroborated the statement of his lady, ending his exemplary speech by saying, with a glance of extreme tenderness, "How is it possible that it should be otherwise?"

The smart little one-horse chariot, which held two insides, and one or more, if necessary, on the dickey behind, was then ordered to be at the door precisely at one o'clock, which was an hour almost certain to insure the agreeable "coincidence," as Mrs. Stephens called it, of finding "the

Dermonts" at luncheon, to which meal all morning visitors at the Mount, who timed their visits well, were always invited.

The interval between breakfast and setting out upon this visit was spent by the three highly enlightened individuals of whom I have been speaking, in a state of great intellectual enjoyment. The two gentlemen placed themselves one on each side of a table, on which were many books, most of of them unbound, many from the United States, and all displaying such an aspect of what Mrs. Stephens called "appetizing freshness of intellectual food," as could not fail to make even the most superficial examination of them profitable.

Mrs. Stephens watched them, as they thus disposed of themselves, with an approving smile, and drawing her little work-table close to the side of her husband, she gave him another and a very intelligent smile as she opened its drawer, and drew forth her favourite work, saying, "Now then, begin reading scraps, and talking about them,

my dear friends, and you have no notion how rapidly I shall work. Methinks my needle partakes of the nature of the fabled pigeons, and spreads its wings, and flies at the touch of soul-inspiring thought !”

“That’s as like, as like can be, ma’am,” returned the American, “to some of the fine poetical compositions that I get in my monthly receipt-à-cle from the pens of my fair countrywomen. In the article of female inspiration, we progress in double quick time, I promise you; and it’s only, I expect, such ladies as yourself, who neither scruple nor fear to profess that degree of intellectual freedom as properly belongs to the Unitarian persuasion, as can fully realise, and mix-in like, with the superiority of the American female.”

Mrs. Stephens raised her eyes from her work, and fixed them with an immense deal of rather mysterious expression on the face of her husband.

“Yes, sweetest, I understand that dear glance well,” said Mr. Stephens, “and I shall

not scruple to interpret it to our excellent transatlantic friend, Mr. Holingsworth. The fact is, Mr. Holingsworth," he continued, stretching out his hand across the sofa table, and laying it on the arm of the American, "the fact is, that I was brought up as a clergyman of the Church of England, and of course I have the greatest possible respect for the Establishment and all that. But this dear angel here, has crept into my head as well as my heart, and I will not deny that she has emancipated my intellect from a vast deal of rubbish with which education had encumbered it. The writings of many of your countrymen, my good friend, have done much to complete the work, and I can no longer resist the conviction, that every human being who wishes to think, to reason, and to judge for himself, ought to become an Unitarian."

"Upon my word, Mr. Stephens, sir, I expect that I might stop from July to eternity, before I could hope to hear a gentleman deliver his opinion more elegant than you have

done at this present speaking. What you have now delivered is first-rate truth, sir, you may be availed of that; and if you have got to thank your lady for having wiped your mind clean from all the rust and dust, that your bishops and archbishops, and your deans and your prebends, are for everlasting heaping up about those who will bide and bear them, why I must say that if her will and wishes govern your will and wishes, it is no more than what it ought to be—seeing that in this great matter she has shown herself so considerable the superior—which is what, in the common way, we don't approve allowing to the female—except just upon the American Parnasus."

"Fine spirits have fine issues, Mr. Holingsworth!" replied the newly-fledged Unitarian. "Did you know my charming, my admirable Arabella more intimately, you would be aware that, in her case at least, the female soul is fabricated of a vastly finer material than it is possible for that of man to be."

"Well, now," returned Mr. Holingsworth

a little doubtingly, "I expect it would take a pretty considerable time to make me go entirely the whole hog as to that. But nevertheless I realise quite altogether, sir, the obligation you owe to the female in this instance, and I feel noways surprised at your being kinder-like overcome by it."

That no probabilities may seem to be violated by the rather peculiar language of Mr. Holingsworth, and its appearing to pass current as that of an accomplished gentleman in the judgment of so educated a pair as Mr. and Mrs. Stephens, it may be advisable to mention that this gentleman had been introduced to them by a letter from a well-known publisher in the United States, as an individual of very considerable importance in the transatlantic literary world. He was, in fact, no less a person than the editor of the celebrated Arch-Anti-Episcopal Review and Magazine, a monthly publication, considered by many who contributed to it as one of the most enlightened and valuable periodicals which had as yet appeared either

in the Union or out of it. All American editors do not, most assuredly, indulge as freely in the rich peculiarities of transatlantic idiom as Mr. Holingsworth, nor did the majority of the articles in the Arch-Anti-Episcopal appear to proceed from precisely the same font as that from whence he drew both his inspiration and his phraseology. Mr. Holingsworth was a native of New Hampshire; his father had been a pork-butcher, and his mother kept a small lodging-house. His first personal attempt at "getting along," was in the line of his father; but being rather clumsy in the use of his tools, he cut his thumb, which occasioned his "quitting" that profitable line of business for ever. He next devoted himself to the preparation and sale of tripe, and having met with considerable success in this line, ambition prompted him again to "change his hand," though not to "check his pride," for he now employed his little capital in the porter trade. This business likewise favoured him so much, that he was wont to say his

very success obliged him to abandon it; for his capital would not suffice for the enlarged custom which presented itself. He therefore, with a degree of wisdom which might truly be said to be in advance of his age, disposed of his porter brewery to a physician, whose practice left him sufficient leisure to attend to it, and having by this time acquired a strong literary bias, not only from the nature of the various occupations in which he had been engaged, but also from having fallen into the habit of attending more than one of those admirable debating societies in which so many of the gentlemen of the United States complete their education, he proposed himself as partner to a celebrated bookseller and publisher at New York. The money which it was suspected he had made in business, and the talents which it was known he had displayed in debating, convinced the judicious publisher that he would do well to accept his offer. As time wore on, the literary propensities of Mr. Holingsworth strengthened, till at length

he conceived, and executed, the project of editing a periodical. The circumstance of his being himself a publisher, was of course highly advantageous to the publication, and the Arch-Anti-Episcopal made money. But neither Mr. Holingsworth nor his partner were men likely to let grass grow under their feet from any deficiency in the active get-along principle. Bookselling, publishing, and editing, did not altogether furnish occupation enough for the active spirit of Mr. Holingsworth, and accordingly it was settled between him and his almost equally active partner, that he should take a trip to the "old country," for the purpose of obtaining from such authors there, as had the honour and glory of being known by reputation in the United States, the promise of an early copy of their works for transatlantic republication. This was the cause of Mr. Holingsworth's visit to England, and such the history of his past life.

Though the preparations for the fête were already going on with great activity,

in almost every part of the grounds and mansion at the Mount, Mrs. Dermont herself would have been greatly shocked, had she not been found as usual in the composed possession of her drawing-room. Neither Albert's wild proposal of converting it into an eating-room, nor any other of the necessary *derangements* consequent upon so extensive a reception, had been permitted to invade this elegant retreat; and there sat Mrs. Dermont, when Mr. and Mrs. Stephens and their American friend entered, the very picture of elegant repose, though every other individual in the family was in a bustle.

All the men servants, with the colonel and Alfred to assist them, were busily employed in erecting upon the lawn three tents, which had been borrowed from the officers; Julia, with Mrs. Dermont's maid to help her, was working with indefatigable perseverance upon unnumbered yards of calico, white, pink, blue, yellow, and crimson, which by the aid of wire, she was converting, with marvellous skill, into roses and lilies with-

out end, the which, being combined with abundance of evergreens, were intended to hang in graceful wreaths about the white drapery of the tents.

The housekeeper, the cook, the scullion, laboured from morn to dewy eve, in the production of every imaginable variety of delicate prettinesses, both sweet and savoury. The dairy-maid was inventing all sorts of contrivances to make her cool dairy cooler still, for the preservation of incredible quantities of cream. The gardener was hoarding his ripe strawberries, by sheltering his beds from the superfluous sun. The butler's pantry was locked, and double locked, to secure the plate which had, to the last ounce, been drawn forth from its strong hold, to abide a general polishing; and, in short, there was no other corner of the establishment, in which there might not be heard, or seen, some symptom of preparation.

Happily, however, for the feelings of Mrs. Dermont, one of the men servants, engaged in the operations going forward, upon the

lawn, most fortunately caught sight of Mr. Stephens's carriage as it approached the house; and although he was, at the moment, in the act of assisting his master in fastening a stretching peg in the ground, he had sufficient presence of mind to prove his interest in the honour of the family, by instantly dropping his hammer, and exclaiming, "a carriage, sir!" darted off, catching up his livery coat as he ran—and thereby was enabled, though a good deal out of breath, to announce, "Mr. and Mrs. Stephens," in a style befitting the dignity of the Mount.

Mrs. Dermont certainly, at that moment, felt very thankful that she had steadily refused the entreaties of Julia, "only to cut out a few leaves." It was from no feelings of harshness towards her that she had done so. On the contrary, she had cut out many the evening before, when doors and windows being closed for the night, she had felt there was no danger of being caught in the fact of performing a mechanical operation, to assist

the preparations for her own fête. Nothing could be more lady-like and tranquilly idle, than the manner in which she was now found sitting in her elegant drawing-room, fabricating, with a pretty mother-of-pearl crochet, a purse for Alfred, in the most delicate shades of green and lavender colour. She felt conscious, that notwithstanding the multitudinous labours, which she well knew were going on in all directions round her, she *did* look lady-like and idle ; and this consciousness made the arrival of her new neighbours an agreeable event, inasmuch, as it effectually proved that, however differently things might be managed by the minor magnates of the neighbourhood, the establishment at the Mount sufficed to produce a fête, magnificent enough to astonish the neighbourhood, without deranging the elegant repose of its mistress for a moment.

Mrs. Dermont had not hitherto quite made up her mind whether to like, or dislike, the newly-arrived occupants of Beech-hill. She

greatly approved their moving the vulgar old posts and rails which formerly surrounded the lawn, and replacing them by so very light and neat an iron fence. But she did not quite like the free and easy style in which Mrs. Stephens overhauled all the neatly-bound annuals upon the drawing-room table, the very first time they had dined at the Mount; nor did she quite relish the sort of patronising tone in which she had said, on the same occasion, that if any of the family were readers they should be perfectly welcome to dip into the treasures of Mr. Stephens's library, which she rather believed they would find a good deal out of the common way. There was something in the notion that the family at the Mount could want to borrow any thing of any body, which rather grated on Mrs. Dermont's feelings. But then, on the other hand, Mr. Stephens's manner of expressing his admiration of the house, grounds, drawing-room, dining-room, dinner-table, side-board, and various other parts and parcels of the numerous elegances

displayed at the Mount, was so very gentleman-like and pleasing, that she felt it was impossible to doubt his having been in very good company—and that was a great point with Mrs. Dermont. But then again there was something a little too much like a tone of equality in Mr. Stephens's manner of saying that they only waited till the smell of paint had left the dining-room, in order to fix a day for seeing the Mount family; as if it were so perfectly a matter of certainty that the Mount family would go wherever they were asked. However, there was something, as I have said, extremely soothing to the feelings of Mrs. Dermont in being thus found in such a state of philosophically aristocratic composure just two days before the fête, the prospect of which, she well knew, had put all the neighbourhood in confusion; and this pleasing sensation caused her to receive Mr. and Mrs. Stephens, and their rather odd-looking friend, with very smiling politeness.

Mrs. Dermont was not one of the people

who thought it right and proper to shake hands with every body, but she now gave the tips of four fingers to Mrs. Stephens, and one might almost say her whole hand to Mr. Stephens, and listened to their announcement of Mr. Holingsworth's name almost as if she did not feel surprised at their taking the liberty of bringing him. Mrs. Stephens, however, was too clever a woman not to remember that it would be exceedingly important to her enjoyment of the approaching fête that Mrs. Dermont should not only permit Mr. Holingsworth to accompany them, but that his doing so should be considered as a compliment, and not a liberty. She greatly disliked the idea of being treated with any thing like coldness by the first people in the neighbourhood, when all the rest were there to witness it, and it was therefore with her very best skill that she now set about the business in hand.

It was not very often that Mrs. Stephens resorted to any thing save her intellectual superiority where she was bent upon making

a particularly favourable impression, but she thought she could not quite trust to this at present, and therefore, while her husband and the New-York publisher walked away to a distant window, in order to admire the fine trees, and the very green grass which grew under them, Mrs. Stephens drew a chair close to the sofa on which the lady of the house was seated, and thus addressed her. "It is probable, my dear Mrs. Dermont, that you are not yet acquainted with the name of Holingsworth, because in fact he is but recently arrived in England, but I should really feel wanting in duty to myself, to you, to the colonel, and to your highly-gifted son, if I failed to make you acquainted with the fact, that he is one of the most celebrated men who have visited England for many years. His principal object in visiting the country is that he may judge by personal observation and his own experience, of the general tone of manners of the English aristocracy, before he publishes his great work on the general aspect of society throughout Europe.

Can you wonder, my dear lady, that knowing this, we should be anxious to bring him here? Can you wonder that we should be delighted to obtain permission for him to be present at your fête on Thursday? or that, above all, we should be deeply anxious that he should not leave Stoke, without having been introduced to your son?"

This last hint in particular arose from what Mrs. Stephens was accustomed to designate as her *practical metaphysics*. She particularly piqued herself upon having studied with success the nature of the human soul, and she not unfrequently proved, as in the present instance, that she really did know something about it, for Mrs. Dermont, though a good deal inclined to be stiff to new people in general, relaxed at once on hearing these moving and most judicious words, and replied, exactly in the well-pleased tone which the philosophical lady expected to hear, that both the colonel and herself would be extremely happy to see the gentlemen with them on Thursday.

This important offer being happily accomplished, Mrs. Stephens again made a practical use of her metaphysical studies, saying, "That having thus performed her duty to her country in general, and her kind neighbours in particular, by not suffering such an opportunity to be lost of showing England to advantage to the distinguished traveller, they must now take their leave, as their next duty was to show him the magnificent view of the colonel's house and grounds as seen from the upper road to Overby." Had there been any chance of luncheon, Mrs. Stephens would have run the risk of letting the "celebrated foreigner" display to the whole family of the Dermont's assembled, the exquisite idiom of his Doric English. For Mrs. Stephens had a peculiarly strong partiality for a good luncheon, but as Mrs. Dermont had very civilly said, that she was sorry they had come too late for that repast; the gifted mistress of Beech Hill, thought it would be "wisest, discreetest," and therefore undeniably "best," not to run

any risk of the fine issues of his fine spirit being mistaken by the uninitiated family at the Mount for mere unsublimated Yankeeisms, and she therefore retreated to enjoy, with her beloved William in private, the outpourings of a philosophy too congenial to be rejected on account of any idiom whatever.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE important day arrived, as it was pretty sure to do; and moreover, which was not quite so certain, it arrived bright in sunshine, and with scarcely wind enough to wave the very lightest ringlet which was intended to wanton in its breath.

The hour appointed by the invitation cards for assembling was two, and before half an hour beyond it had worn itself away, the lawn at the Mount looked as gay as the somewhat undignified district around could make it. There were, as there always must be at every English "gathering," many very pretty young women. The seven red-coats from Overby illumined the various groups,

as planets illumine the heavens, when they shine out proudly amongst the lesser stars. Nor were there wanting a few really aristocratic-looking equipages, two of them having four horses, and one a goodly pair of outriders; which circumstances, trifling as they may appear to persons who "get such things often" between their lodge gates and their hall doors, were of very considerable importance, not only to Mrs. Dermont herself, but to a large proportion of her company. The officers were greatly pleased to see "the Oswalds" and "the Fitzwarringtons" arrive, because it would give them an opportunity of improving the acquaintance begun by the heads of these illustrious houses having left their cards at all their lodgings, but which had not yet advanced very far, from the circumstance of their having all been from home when this honour was done them. The Kersleys, the Murrays, and the Morrises felt, as they watched the equipages advance, that it was exceedingly pleasant, and a great advantage to

meet "the county people;" and the beautiful Miss Thorwold, and her elegant friend Mrs. Knight, told each other that it was really a comfort to see a few decent carriages.

Wise folks may laugh as much as they will about the folly and vanity of the fairer part of the creation, on account of their undisguised partiality to the military profession; but it is vain to deny that whenever and wherever any thing in the shape of a fête is going forward, the presence of its members is both useful and ornamental in the highest degree. That country young ladies, who rarely leave their native shades, should be pleased that a few additional eyes should come to look at them there, is extremely natural. "It is so happy," as I once heard a young German lady say, in her very piquant English; "it is so happy to look pretty!" And where is the class upon whom the necessity of making themselves agreeable acts so strongly as upon those who are for ever obliged to make their

home among strangers? And again; will not all the ladies agree in declaring, that among all the gentlemen presented to them at a country ball, or a country meeting of any sort, two-thirds of them, at the very least, are ill-dressed — an evil most enchantingly guarded against in the military by *regulation*. But beyond all else, perhaps, the neighbourhood of a party of military is a blessing to the givers of fêtes, by its power of bestowing a military band to assist it. Every body, gentlemen *almost* as much as ladies, declared upon the present occasion that the party would have been nothing without the band of the —. And in truth, the band of the — did make a great difference. Not all the fiddles ever provided at Overby, either for race or assize ball, with the pipe and tabor to boot, could have produced from behind the laurels so exhilarating an effect as did the wind instruments of the — band. There must have been a very considerable knowledge of the nervous sys-

tem in those who first invented the fashion of rousing men up to fighting pitch by the sound of the trumpet; and it may be questioned, I think, if any animal ever listened to the startling, shrill, and thrilling cadence of wind instruments, without feeling the spirit roused thereby. Why such vibrations should produce such effects I have never heard explained, but that so it is, was never proved more satisfactorily, on a small scale, than at Mrs. Dermont's *déjeuner à la fourchette*. Mrs. Dermont herself, as she listened to the inspiring sounds, and watched the gay groups meandering upon the sun-and-shadow-chequered lawn, with measured step, and glances bright with enjoyment, felt as pleased and as proud as ever Juno did, when seated on a cloud beside the Thunderer, at some general roll-call of the gods, whereat she presided as acknowledged queen. The colonel snuffed the sweet air, and looked military. Alfred almost forgot to think about himself, and Julia positively looked pretty.

"Inspiring!" cried Mrs. Stephens, with a sort of electric glance at her young husband.

"Very fine indeed, ma'am," said Mr. Holingsworth, who thought the word, being rather poetical, was addressed to him.

"How divinely beautiful!" exclaimed Janet Murray.

"It is like being in heaven!" returned her sister.

"Upon my word, my dear, this is enough to make one take a house in the country," said Mrs. Kersley, who was conscious that they were doing exceedingly well in the world, and had as good a right to a lawn and a shrubbery as some of their county neighbours. "How full of spirits Dick looks, doesn't he?—and upon my word and honour, I think Lavinia is the handsomest girl here."

Old Mrs. Morris, the vicar's widow, looked gayer and happier than she had done for half-a-dozen years before; and her pretty delicate-looking daughter, when she saw En-

sign Wheeler offer his arm to conduct her infirm parent to a bench, where she could enjoy a perfect view of the scene, thought that this certainly was going to be the happiest day in her life. Even Mrs. Verepoint, though she did not quite approve the general style of the place, allowed that, just then, it certainly did look very pretty; and her daughter, Charlotte, totally forgot for the time being that Colonel Dermont always made her feel sleepy; that looking at Mrs. Dermont's erect stateliness, made her back ache; that Alfred, notwithstanding his beauty, was any thing but agreeable; and that Julia could hardly rank higher in creation than a mouse — having a soft-looking skin, a bright eye, a noiseless tread, and a strong propensity to run away and hide herself, if any body came near her. All this was considerably more than half owing to the effect of the military band; and were we to examine into the state of spirits of each individual of the eighty-seven there assembled, we should probably

not find one, who on first marching forward on that soft turf, to the sound of the unseen instruments, did not experience a sensation of *bien-être* and gaiety, which had its origin wholly and solely from them.

Were I a physician, my prescriptions would often have sonatas instead of solutions, and arias in the place of essences. But it will not do for me so completely to identify myself with my favourite Mrs. Stephens, as to pursue the "theory of oral vibrations" any further; I must, on the contrary, record one remarkable instance where this influence appeared to be totally unfelt; yet even here, perhaps, the insensibility did not arise from any deficiency, or uncertainty, in the marvellous powers of sound, but from the preponderance, in one instance at least, of that of sight. When Miss Celestina Marsh, stepping forth from the carriage of Mrs. Verepoint, and, following the steps of that lady through a gate which at once conducted them to the scene of action, beheld the bright assemblage of company

assembled there—of which a fair moiety were of the nobler sex, and seven of them clothed in scarlet—when she beheld this spectacle, her whole soul seemed to rush into her eyes.

Any one, indeed, who would have given himself the trouble of turning from the scene which so enchanted her, in order to trace in those round black eyes its particular effect upon her feelings, would have seen a fire, a glow, an ecstasy of delight, flashing from them, as they moved with supernatural rapidity from one point to another, which might have suggested the fear of excitement, approaching to delirium—for was not her Wheeler there?—did she not see him?—yes! despite the dazzling brightness of that moving throng, Celestina discovered him, ere half-a-dozen keen flashes from those wandering eyes had been darted forth in the search. And how did she find him occupied? Was he flirting with another? Were his steps, ever the surest echo in the dance to the gay sounds which

inspired it, were those dear steps now taken in graceful and harmonious accord with the notes of the brazen instruments, which sent forth their delicious words of command from behind the laurels!—No! the steps of her Wheeler were short, slow, uncertain, and every movement seemed constrained and awkward. Ah! Joy of joys!—it was an old, evidently a very old, or very infirm woman, upon whom he was in such close attendance! Her Wheeler was now performing what he doubtless felt to be a duty—the sweet office of rewarding him should be hers, when the moment came for exchanging the task of following the painful steps of decrepitude, for that of attending her own bounding movement through the dance; and as the thought arose, the happy Celestina looked down upon her satin shoes, and remembered, with a keen pulsation of delight, that though her feet were long, and her ankles not *very* slender, and though her person was in some respects rather bulky, she had energy of character and of muscle,

which not only sufficed to counteract these defects, but to bear her onward on the fantastic toe, with a pertinacity of vigour that few, or rather none, of her acquaintance could equal.

She remembered, too, every particular of her new and showy dress! With all these sources of abounding happiness and promised enjoyment at her heart, Miss Celestina Marsh curvetted on beside the tranquil Charlotte Verepoint, very like a great, unbroken Flanders colt, beside a dainty-paced little Arabian. Mr. Marsh, who, with Mrs. Verepoint on his arm, was a few steps in advance of his sister, perceived, with a glance as rapid as her own, that the young man whose *constancy of character* was of such vital importance to her existence, had arrived before them. But he saw also, which she did not, that the new gray bonnet which had superseded a more familiar black one, sheltered the head of the worthy Mrs. Morris!—he saw, too, that the pretty creature, her daughter, though at that mo-

ment engaged in conversation with Julia Drummond, was at no great distance behind; and all his unfortunate sister had confided to him respecting the gay ensign's suspected inconstancy, recurred to his mind. The young man's attention to Louisa's mother he thought more alarming than almost any degree of attention to herself could have been. "Alas!" thought he, "that looks as if he were really in earnest;" and he anxiously turned round his head to see how Celestina bore it. Equally to his pleasure and surprise, however, he perceived that she was evidently in a state of the most vehement enjoyment; but though heartily glad of this, there was something in the style and manner in which this happy state of spirits was displayed, set off too, as it was, by its contrast to the appearance and manner of her companion, that made him feel singularly ill at ease, and in the hope of making the party less conspicuous, he asked Mrs. Verepoint if she would not like to sit down?

"Certainly, Mr. Marsh," she replied, "you shall escort me, if you please, to that bench yonder. Mrs. Morris is a great favourite with me; I shall like to sit down by her."

This was not exactly the direction which George Marsh would have preferred; but obedience was unavoidable, even though he heard a loud chuckle of delight from Celestina, who was now close behind him, and trembled as he anticipated the revulsion of spirits, which he thought likely to follow. But, although that young lady had now recognised the vicinity of "the hateful Morrisises," her gaiety was not as yet checked thereby, for Louisa was dressed in the very plainest white muslin frock, that ever a young lady wore on such an occasion. Moreover, she had not had even the wit, as Miss Marsh herself would have expressed it, to have it made in the least bit, *décoleté*, and therefore, of course, "she looked like a fright." Radiant in the wreath of red roses on the outside of her singularly small bonnet, and the wreath of red roses on the inside; flut-

tering and flounced in bobbinet, over stiffened thin pink satin ; conscious of a happy formation of *corsage*, which, while it mimicked the shape of a morning dress, concealed nothing which an evening one could have displayed; how was it possible that Celestina Marsh could, at that moment, have felt any jealous pangs from the vicinity of poor, shabby-looking little Louisa Morris? who, though she had made her mother purchase a new bonnet, had insisted upon it, that she did not want one for herself, and who certainly looked, with all her bright brown silken curls concealed by the said bonnet, which was both close and large, as little like the pretty girl she really was, as it was well possible she could do. But Louisa had been given to understand that there was to be dancing, and as it never occurred to her, that young ladies would choose to dance in fantastical head gear, representing hats and bonnets, without really being either, she had trusted to the very beautiful head-dress which nature had given her, and thought

that her ringlets, which were of equal length all round her pretty little head, falling upon her close fitting white frock, would do very well.

Nor was she, perhaps, very far wrong in her calculations ; but while the bonnet was on, she certainly did not look so smart as her neighbours, and the comfort which this afforded to Miss Marsh was very great.

In approaching the bench which Mrs. Verepoint wished to occupy, the party passed close to Ensign Wheeler, and the delighted Celestina took advantage of the opportunity to give him a playful tap on the shoulder with the stick of her parasol. " Good morning, Miss Marsh," said the young man, suddenly turning towards her. " I hope I see you well ?"

" What a sad creature, you are," returned the young lady, with an overwhelmingly brilliant flash from her great round black eyes. " I believe you have positively forgotten the way to Locklow Wood. Did not

I tell you, Mr. Wheeler, when I met you in Overby, the other day, that my brother has a private right of fishing in the beautiful stream that runs through our estate?—George ! I wish you would tell Mr. Wheeler, yourself, that you do not intend to take him up as a poacher, even if you were to see him angling in Locklow Meads.”

On being thus called upon, George Marsh hastened to place Mrs. Verepoint on the seat she had chosen, and turned to address the young ensign, with a degree of eagerness, which showed how well he remembered his poor Celestina’s statement, that *all the happiness of her life depended on him*. “I hope, Celestina, that Mr. Wheeler knows it would give me the greatest pleasure to see him, either at my house, or in any part of the grounds, where he thought he could find amusement,” said he, holding out his hand with an air of the greatest cordiality. The young officer took his hand, bowed, coloured, thanked him, but altogether looked so shy, and so foolish, that the well-pleased brother

thought, there must certainly still be something, a good deal more than common, in his feelings for Celestina, or he never could appear so agitated.

“Fix a day, George !” whispered Celestina in his ear ; but this fixing was not easy, because the ensign had already moved off, and seemed preparing to address Miss Morris, who stood shyly behind her mother, and modestly aloof from the bench that was honoured by the occupation of Mrs. and Miss Verepoint, who, of all the “county people” were those for whom Mrs. Morris always expressed the deepest respect.

Perceiving the young ensign’s purpose, George Marsh checked the steps with which he was approaching him, determined to await a better opportunity for giving the invitation dictated by his sister. But the ardour of that young lady was ill-calculated to brook such delay, and thrusting her arm under that of her brother, she compressed it with very considerable strength, and whispered from between her closed teeth, in a

manner which very clearly displayed the agitated state of her mind. "Will you let him go away then, without it? Is it possible, George, that you can be such a dreadful brute! Would to Heaven I were dead! Or that I had a brother—or any other human creature belonging to me, who was capable of pitying the agonies I suffer, and of stretching out a friendly hand to help, and save me!"

Inexpressibly shocked at this sudden transition from rapture to despair, the greatly harassed young man, first made a hasty step forward, and then more hastily still turned round, and stepped back again, in terror, lest the feelings of his unhappy sister should betray themselves, and lead her to expose herself, and her tender passion, to the whole neighbourhood at once.

A more thoroughly independent-minded man than George Marsh did not exist, and never in his life before, had he felt so much in awe of his fellow-creatures, as he did at that moment. There was something in the

idea, that every mocking eye might be turned upon his unhappy sister, scrutinising at once her ill-concealed love, and her utter want of attraction to obtain a return, which utterly overpowered his courage, and his presence of mind.

“My dear, dearest Celestina!” he whispered in her ear as he returned to her, “for my sake, for your own, which is a thousand times more precious to me, control your emotions! Shall I take you home, my poor Celestina? Trust me, that the moment you get clear of this crowd you will be better!—you will indeed, dearest! Come with me, Celestina!” and saying these words, he tenderly took her hand, and drawing it beneath his arm, endeavoured with gentle violence to draw her away.

“Gracious heaven, George! Are you distracted?” she replied, in vain endeavouring to reduce her voice to a whisper as little audible as his had been. And then, perceiving that her sharp exclamation had attracted the attention of several persons near

her, she burst into a gay laugh, and said to two ladies with whom she was slightly acquainted, "You must not take fright at my brother's sentimental ways—he has learned all that sort of thing in Germany, I believe—and he is for ever fancying that I am looking ill, and over-fatigued, and even now, would you believe it? he has a fancy that I had better go home, for fear this unusual sort of party should prove too exciting for me!—Oh! there never was such a dear silly goose as my brother George!"

"Upon my word, Mr. Marsh," said Mrs. Knight, the lady to whom Celestina had addressed herself, "I do not wonder at your sister quizzing you a little, if you fancy she looks delicate, and out of health. I really know no lady of my acquaintance who appears to me to give less cause for such anxiety. She certainly looks the very picture of robust health. What can have put such tender doubts and fears about her into your head?"

Relieved from his alarm respecting his

sister's actual state of mind, Mr. Marsh, though a little startled by this unlooked-for attack, answered it with less embarrassment than might have been expected, declaring that, notwithstanding Celestina's rosy cheeks, she was really not so strong as she appeared, and that therefore he was obliged to take care of her.

At this moment Colonel Dermont and his lady, who had been assiduously going from group to group, bestowing precisely the proper salutation upon each, approached Mrs. Knight, and her friend Miss Thorwold, who were among the last arrivals, and welcomed them with the most courteous cordiality. The strongly expressed admiration of Alfred for the young lady giving her a degree of importance in the estimation of both, that no rank or fortune of any amount or degree could have obtained for her without it. Not that they either of them particularly admired the young lady themselves, nor had they the very slightest wish to select her for a daughter-in-law; but, in their estimation, the cir-

cumstance of their son's admiration was quite sufficient to place her actually, and *bonâ fide*, in a position of higher consequence than any other circumstance whatever could possibly have done.

Alfred had said that Miss Thorwold was the handsomest girl he had ever seen, and Miss Thorwold was therefore beyond all further question the beauty *par excellence* of the county of ——. This always is, and always will be, a pre-eminence that confers distinction for the time being, and accordingly both the Colonel and Mrs. Dermont addressed the young lady with the sort of observance which is everywhere accorded to a *prima donna*.

Nevertheless, while rendering their homage to this fair sovereign of the hour, their habitual amenity to all their other guests was by no means forgotten, and turning from the beauty and her friend they greeted the owner of Locklow and his sister with polite hospitality, and then, by way of saying some-

thing appropriate, and amiable, the colonel asked Mr. Marsh if he were fond of dancing.

Before the young man could reply, Mrs. Knight answered for him. "Of course he is, Colonel Dermont. Mr. Marsh is just returned from Germany, is he not? The only country in the world where people really know how to waltz. Of course you prefer this dance, do you not, Mr. Marsh, to all others?"

"I certainly do," he replied laughing, "and for a very good reason, Mrs. Knight; I do not know any other."

"I am sure it is the only one worth knowing," lisped the beauty with an inviting look.

"May I ask to have the honour of waltzing with you, Miss Thorwold?" he replied.

The young lady had already smiled her acquiescence, though she had not yet spoken it, when Colonel Dermont interfered, much in the style that a minister plenipotentiary

might have done, if some point of etiquette respecting the sovereign he represented, had been infringed.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Marsh," said he, "but it is the purpose of Mr. Alfred Dermont, my son, to open our champêtre ball with this young lady. You will, I am sure, have the kindness to excuse my interference, Mr. Marsh; and Miss Thorwold, I trust, will not refuse my son the honour of leading her out."

Now, as to George Marsh, the honour of waltzing with the beauty was one which it cost him no very severe pang to resign, for though quite aware that she *was* beautiful, he did not like her. She had an air of pretension about her, which was in his opinion almost the greatest defect that a beautiful woman could have, and he therefore made his bow of resignation with very good grace, assuring the dignified master of the ceremonies that he would not for the world interfere with so in every way proper an arrangement.

But the young lady had a fancy for the German-taught waltzing of the young squire of Locklow Wood, and was fully determined to "dance a measure" with him; nevertheless she was at least equally determined to open the ball with the young squire of the Mount, and therefore, with a smile that was bland, and beautiful enough, to smooth greater difficulties, she replied, "Your son does me great honour, Colonel Dermont, an honour which of course I cannot but accept with gratitude. But in the course of the morning, Mr. Marsh, I shall hope to get a tour de waltz with you."

Celestina, meanwhile, although well-enough pleased at being seen in the same group with the most fashionable party on the ground, had by no means abandoned her project of making her brother *fix a day* for getting the *retroso* ensign to Locklow; and when, having bowed his thanks for Miss Thorwold's condescending civility, and spoken his purpose of holding himself in readiness to obey her commands, George Marsh

modestly backed out of the admiring circle which was closing round her; his sister again seized upon him, and again whispered in his ear, "For Heaven's sake, George, cross the ground with me to where he is standing!—How is it possible for him to ask me to dance if I stay here."

"My dear love! He will come to you—be quite sure, if he means to ask you to dance, he will come to you," said the unhappy George, endeavouring to evade the pursuit on which his sister was determined.

"If he means to ask me!" cried Celestina bitterly. "You have nothing to do, sir, but just to go on behaving in the brutal manner you are doing at present, in order to prevent him, and every other man in existence from coming near me!"

"What is it you would have me do, my poor Celestina?" cried the kind-hearted young man, who as he looked at her heightened colour, and the fierce expression of her angry eyes, thought her the most unfortunate and the most pitiable young woman in

the world. "You surely would not wish that I should ask him to dance with you?"

"Is not that a deliberate insult, sir?—is it not intended as a deliberate insult?" said Celestina, looking daggers at him.

The heart of her brother smote him. He felt that it *was* an insult; and as his pity for her always increased in exact proportion to his conviction of her want of attraction, the showy vulgarity of her appearance at this moment, together with what he felt to be the excessive plainness of her agitated features, positively brought tears into his eyes, and he said, "Forgive me, Celestina! Only tell me what you wish me to do, and I will do it instantly."

"That is all I ask!" was her reply. "If you would only have the humanity to do every thing I tell you, I am convinced that my happiness would be the result. Go now, then, my dear George; just pass your arm under his, and lead him off from that detestable girl. Ah! George! She has a mother to manage for her, and take my word for it, that it is nothing in the world but the clever-

ness of the old woman which keeps him away from me. Go, then, and bring him to me. And, fail not as you lead him over the lawn to fix a day for him to come early to fish at Locklow Wood, and make him understand that he is to dine with us, quietly, afterwards. That is all I ask of you at this moment, George. And surely there is no great difficulty in it. Go, I tell you—I will sit down here, and wait till you bring him.”

CHAPTER IX.

ICES, coffee, and cakes, having been assiduously offered to every individual assembled, the business of the meeting began; that is to say the band, after having hushed their inspiring sounds for a few minutes, burst forth again with better effect than ever; for the march was changed to a waltz, and in less than five minutes above fifteen couple were whirling round the ample circle left clear for them, on the "smooth shaven green." The scene was a very pretty one, and there was a general air of enjoyment upon almost every countenance, which tended not a little to its embellishment.

Alfred Dermont looked happier, and hand-

somer than he had ever done in his life, for his animal spirits were too much excited to leave him for a moment within reach of the malady under which he so often languished. He had no time to be wilful—no leisure to be selfish, and was therefore what his unspoiled nature would have ever made him, one of the gayest and brightest creatures in existence. His beautiful partner was all smiles, all fascination. However lofty her graver speculations might be respecting the position to which she intended her extraordinary beauty should raise her, for the present moment, at least, she was perfectly well contented by feeling convinced that she was destroying the peace of mind of Alfred for ever. For was he not in all respects the first young man in the company? He was the richest, and the handsomest; and moreover the fête was his fête, and he had therefore the greatest power of making her conspicuous by his attentions. How was it possible, therefore, that she could do better than devote herself, for the time being, to the captivating him, heart and soul, so as to

leave him little or no chance of ever knowing a moment's peace afterwards?

The reasoning was conclusive, and the conduct of the lovely Amelia most accurately regulated by it. The fête, however, was to endure for many hours, and really brilliant as it was, there might perhaps have been a possibility that her fascinating energies might, in some slight degree, have relaxed during the course of it, had it not been for a trifling accident, which acted very effectually as a stimulant.

That Julia Drummond should have been the most active and the most efficient agent in all the pretty preparations which had given to the whole scene so very much the appearance of fairy land, was the most natural thing possible; and could not have been expected to produce, in any member of the family who had watched her proceedings, any sensation partaking of the exciting feeling of surprise. Not so, however, the appearance of her own little person, when, her many labours done, and the most elaborate toilet of her life completed, she

made her appearance upon the lawn, in an extremely pretty white dress, presented to her by the colonel for the occasion, with her silken black locks carefully parted, and pushed back from her beautiful forehead, and one white camilla peeping forth from the rich knot into which her abundant tresses were twisted (very classically) behind, while another of the same delicate flowers met the point in which her perfectly well-fitted dress terminated in front, resting upon an innocent young bosom, as pure, and almost as white as itself.

Alfred, who was the only individual of the family, the master and mistress included, who ventured to appropriate the privilege of cutting whatever blossoms he chose in the conservatory, had asked Julia at breakfast if she should not like a bouquet to make her look smart. To which the little lady replied, with rather a bright flush, "Oh! yes, Alfred! I should indeed; I could make myself as fine as a queen, if I might but have two full-blown white camillas." And two full-blown white camillas, as perfect as

any that ever were seen, were accordingly laid upon her little dressing-table, with their proper accompaniment of dark-green leaves, exactly in time for her to find them there when she went to dress. Alfred was determined she should have them, because he liked to please the little creature, when the doing so interfered with no particular whims or wishes of his own; but he certainly thought that she was a little goose for her pains, and that a handsome bouquet of fine geranium blossoms would have been much more to the purpose.

He very decidedly changed his mind, however, when he saw her appear; which was not, by the bye, till the majority of the company had assembled; for then, to his infinite surprise, and, moreover, greatly to his satisfaction, he perceived that his little magpie, as he often called her, could really look pretty. He looked round for his mother, for he longed, positively longed, to say, "How very pretty little Julia looks!" But Mrs. Dermont was too much absorbed in uttering her hopes that every body she saw was well,

to give him an opportunity, and he could only mutter to himself, which he certainly did with a good deal of unction, "I'll be hanged if I ever let them make such a fright of her again. What a difference dress does make, to be sure!"

This same feeling led him to look at her repeatedly with considerable interest during the course of the day; and this was the circumstance which had served to keep alive in all its pristine vigour, the charming Miss Thorwold's determination not to relax in the display of her fascinations, till she could feel pretty certain of leaving the youth past hope of recovery on the field.

Though looking upon little Julia, her fine eyes, raven hair, cream-coloured skin, white camillas, and all, as infinitely too much below the possibility of a rivalry with her own surpassing beauty, for such a thought to rest upon her mind for a moment, she nevertheless felt it due to herself (to be sure there are throughout the world an immense amount of dues claimed upon this score), not to permit the attention of any man with

whom she condescended to flirt, even for a day, to be withdrawn from her for a single instant; and the youthful, innocent-looking little figure of Julia never approached them in the dance, or seemed likely to obtain a nod or a smile from Alfred in the promenade, without instantly exciting a fresh rush of coquetry from the beautiful Amelia. Nay once, when the probability of this seemed particularly great, her determination to prevent it rose so accurately in proportion, that she actually pressed the arm upon which she leaned, in order to render it impossible. And impossible it certainly became: Julia's bright, happy young glance met no answering glance from the bewildered Alfred in return; who, instead of looking about upon any of the objects that earth could show him, began very strongly to fancy, poor youth, that he was himself more than half way to heaven.

Meanwhile Mrs. Knight, who really, considering that she was no relation, was one of the best and most thoughtful chaperons in the world, employed a good deal of the time

that Mrs. Dermont bestowed upon her, in dilating upon the high fashion of Miss Thorwold's noble relations, and the remarkable consideration in which the young lady herself was held by all the most distinguished circles in London and Paris. To which she added, as a sort of sum total of all the items she had been rehearsing, "In short, my dear Mrs. Dermont, Amelia Thorwold is an angel."

All this important information was very carefully treasured by the person to whom it was addressed, and produced, in a greater degree than such friendly eloquence usually does, exactly the effect intended—that is to say, that before the seventh, and last of these confidential little confabulations came to an end, Mrs. Dermont became convinced, that if her admirable son should, in process of time, come to the conclusion that the beautiful Amelia was the woman he wished for as a wife, there was no reason whatever that this wish should not, like all others which had as yet arisen in his mind, be gratified. Indeed, it was impossible for her to avoid

feeling, as she watched the passionate admiration expressed by every look of her son, while at the same time she listened to Mrs. Knight's account of the young lady's merits, that his selection of her as the chosen of his heart, was only another proof of that universal superiority of intellect in him, which she had considered as so very remarkable almost from his birth.

It must not be supposed, however, that these repeated little tête-à-tête conversations with Mrs. Knight, important as they certainly were, ever caused Mrs. Dermont to forget her duties as mistress of the brilliant revels which were going on around her. Her habits, as well as her natural character, rendered such oblivion impossible. So far, indeed, was this from being the case, that there was not a single person on the ground who could have been found disposed to fancy themselves neglected; which, considering the propensity that all disagreeable people evince for this species of jeremiade, says much for the observant and amiable manners of the mistress of the Mount.

Luckily for Mrs. Dermont there were present at her fête rather a large proportion of that class of unsophisticated persons who take the liberty of enjoying themselves excessively, without giving their hosts any trouble about it. Most of the officers, and nearly all the pretty young ladies of Overby, were of this description; so that, as far as they were concerned, both the colonel and his lady felt that any interference on their part which might tend to convert what was very like the free and independent feelings enjoyed by the frequenter of a *guinguette*, into the species of responsibility and observance, which might have taken its place had they been brought into too frequent contact with their entertainers, would have been much less kind, than cruel. The English, indeed, though often declared to be a shy people, not unfrequently demonstrate a degree of free-and-easiness in this line, which appears to be peculiar to themselves; but in order fairly to judge of this, they must be seen at the fêtes to which so many of them contrive

to obtain admission in royal palaces abroad, where many of them may be observed shouting in lusty merriment over their mantling champagne, utterly unmindful of the presence, or even the close vicinity of the sovereign who is their host. That this strange-sounding statement is true, there are but too many to avouch, and thereupon may the hackneyed quotation be given, more entire than usual; for, changing the pronoun, may we not say? *they* "are mad 'tis true; 'tis pity, and pity 'tis, 'tis true."

But to return to the Mount, and the gay party assembled there. Not that they were all gay, either—nothing, indeed, could be much less gay than poor George Marsh as he walked across the crowded lawn to do his sister's bidding.

There stood the handsome young ensign whom he was to seize upon, by main force, in order to prove his *humanity* to his suffering sister—there he stood, close beside the blushing Louisa Morris, looking the picture of happiness and tender gallantry, and no

more thinking, poor young man, of the blooming Miss Celestina, than of the man in the moon.

Poor George Marsh!—he saw it all!—he understood it all! His unhappy sister had deluded herself into the lamentably false persuasion that this young man, so completely devoted to another, was in love with her! Oh! How should he break this to her?—To postpone the result of his mission till they should be alone, and thus at least to avoid exposure, was the course that first suggested itself. But a moment's reflection convinced him that this was impossible. He knew the fiery impatience of Celestina's temper too well to believe that any thing he could say would induce her to postpone the explanation she would be sure to demand upon his return to her; and so great was his dread of the scene which he anticipated upon her receiving it, that for a moment he thought he had better feign illness, and retire without again seeing her till her return home. But there was a sort of selfishness in this, which was too hostile to his nature to be indulged in

for longer than during the pang of a moment, and that being past, he determined as nearly as possible to obey the instructions of the sister he so deeply pitied.—Poor George Marsh! The species of martyrdom to which he was condemning himself had none of the sustaining self-approval which usually rewards a voluntary victim; for he was about to do what he perfectly well knew ought not to be done, though the gentle pitifulness of his nature left him no strength to refuse doing it. The melancholy contrast which his unfortunate sister appeared in his eyes to offer to all the fair young creatures around her—all basking in the sweet soft light of admiration and incipient love—struck him again with so profound an emotion of pity, that he would rather have died than suffer any additional pang to come to her through him.

“Poor, poor Celestina!” he murmured inwardly, while his eyes fixed themselves involuntarily on the delicate features of Charlotte Verepoint, “poor, poor Celestina!”

Two or three hasty steps brought him to the side of Ensign Wheeler. George Marsh

blushed like a young girl, but he mastered the weakness, and touching the young officer on the arm, he said, "Will you do me the favour, Mr. Wheeler, of walking across the lawn with me to speak to my sister? She wishes that you should fix a day for coming to Locklow Wood next week, that you may get a morning's fishing."

Ensign Wheeler, considering that he was a well-looking, gay-hearted young officer, who "dwelt in country quarters," was an exceedingly well-behaved personage; and knowing perfectly well that he was only invited to this fishing for the chance of being himself caught, he coloured a good deal as he replied, "I should be happy to accompany you to your sister, Mr. Marsh, were I not this moment going to lead Miss Morris to join the dancers. Pray make my compliments to Miss Marsh, and explain this to her."

"Certainly, sir," returned poor George, endeavouring to speak gaily; "but will you fix a day, Mr. Wheeler, for giving us the pleasure of your company at Locklow?"

Again the young officer coloured deeply; but immediately replied, "I am extremely sorry, Mr. Marsh, that it will not be possible for me to accept your invitation ; but I am so constantly occupied at Overby just at present, that I really cannot leave the town for a day ;" and with a somewhat stiff, yet not ungraceful bow, the young ensign stepped back, and repossessed himself of his young partner's hand.

Could George Marsh have contrived at that miserable moment to feel angry with him, it would have been a great relief. But this was impossible. He had not the shadow of a doubt but that the young man was acting with perfect propriety, and the part he was himself performing suddenly appeared to him so detestably the reverse, that all the misery of his orphan sister was for the moment forgotten, and he felt as if he had courage not only to tell her that the young ensign altogether declined her invitation, but to make her understand that it was absolutely necessary she should avoid him for the future as much as possible.

Stimulated by this very rational purpose, he lingered not in his return to the spot where he had left Celestina, who, on her part, no sooner saw him approach than she withdrew herself from the group amidst which she was standing, and beckoned him to the entrance of a shrubby walk near it. Well pleased that he should not have to recount the ill-success of his embassy before witnesses, George quickened his steps, and offering his arm to his sister, prepared to lead her onward into the sheltered walk she appeared to have chosen.

“Good Heaven, George! where are you going to take me?” she exclaimed, ere he had well made a second step in advance. “How can you suppose I want to walk off with you in this way? Do stand still, can’t you? Tell me—why won’t you tell me?—why do you torture me by this horrible suspense? Why did not Wheeler come with you? Poor faint-spirited creature that you are! I’ll bet my life that you had not courage to ask him. Where

is Frederic Wheeler, sir?—why do you refuse to answer me?”

“I will answer you, if you will give me time to speak, Celestina,” replied her brother, with something slightly approaching to displeasure in the tone of his voice. But as he spoke, the unfortunate young man raised his eyes to the flushed face of his sister, and the gaudy and elaborate preparations of her toilet, together with their lamentable failure in producing an agreeable effect, again caused 'him such a profound sensation of pity, that, totally forgetful of her injustice towards himself, he exclaimed, in a voice that trembled with emotion, “Think of him no more, my dearest Celestina! His feelings towards you do not merit the return which your too generous heart is ready to give ;—he thinks not of you, my poor Celestina!—he has positively refused our invitation.”

“I wish with all my soul, that I had given the invitation myself,” she replied, her fierce black eyes flashing upon him, with no very

gentle expression. "I dare say you mean very well, but you are such a monstrous fool, George, that it is quite impossible to trust you. What is your reason, sir, for daring to say that he does not think of me?"

"My reason, Celestina," he replied, with desperate, but necessary courage, "is, that he is evidently devoted to another. You are right in your supposition, that he is attached to Miss Morris. I have seen enough to convince me that this is the case."

For a moment, the unfortunate innamorata felt disposed to declare that this statement was altogether false, and unfounded; but, during that very moment, it chanced that the extended circle of the waltz, now increased by many additional couples, brought the too-charming ensign, and his pretty partner (her bonnet thrown aside, and her beautiful hair floating gaily on the breeze,) close to the spot where the brother and sister stood. The effect was instantaneous. "Oh, oh!" exclaimed Celestina, in a tone which might fairly have been denominated a shriek,

and sunk, fainting, as it seemed from her attitude, upon the grass.

The terrified brother threw himself beside her, and gently raised her head from the ground. Had not Celestina previously made him aware of a constitutional peculiarity which attached to her, namely, that she never lost her colour when she fainted, his fears on her account might have been lessened by looking at her cheeks, which still retained their very remarkably ruddy tint; but having been assured by her, on some former occasion of vehement emotion, that her fainting fits, to which she was extremely subject, were only the more dangerous on that account, he gazed on this unusual union of high colour, and motionless features, with dismay.

“ Oh ! what shall I do for her ? ” he exclaimed aloud. “ Every soul seems to have left the spot, as if on purpose to distract me ! ”

No sooner had he uttered these words, than the fainting lady opened her eyes.

"Put me upon that bench, George," she said, with a very consolatory appearance of restored animation. "I still feel dreadfully faint, and ill, of course; but if you will but run to the house, and contrive to get me a tumbler of water, and a glass of wine in it, I shall be able to get over it. Pray, don't stand staring at me, but go and get it."

George hastened to obey her, and the moment he was gone, Celestina very properly employed her recovered senses in arranging her dress and composing her features. In this she succeeded so well, that her appearance on this rather remote bench, only seemed to indicate a wish of being quiet, and undisturbed; a position, which could hardly fail to touch the conscious heart of Ensign Wheeler, if he should observe it, and which must, at any rate, look picturesque and interesting to every body who looked that way.

On one person, at least, who looked that way, her solitary position did produce an effect, and an effect too of very considerable importance. Mrs. Dermont having finished

one of her little tête-à-tête conferences with Mrs. Knight, on the subject of Miss Thorwold's high fashion, and other angelic qualities, walked forward, as in duty bound, upon the lawn, that she might throw a glance over the whole gay scene, in order to ascertain that every thing was going on as it ought to do. This glance showed her the solitary Celestina Marsh, without a partner, nay, without a companion, and in an attitude which really looked as if she thought the party very dull. This, though the individual was not a particular favourite, could not, of course, be permitted by so hospitable a hostess as Mrs. Dermont, and with a quickened step she immediately approached her, politely inquiring if she did not waltz.

"Oh ! yes, ma'am," replied Celestina, "I am particularly fond of waltzing. Only, unfortunately for me, I have not happened to see any dancing gentlemen with whom I am acquainted."

"Dear me!" returned Mrs. Dermont, "I am very sorry, Miss Marsh, that I was not aware of it before. Do you know any of the

military gentlemen? But, perhaps, you would not like to dance with a stranger?"

"I should not at all mind dancing with a stranger," replied the young lady; "but I am afraid they are not likely to ask me, unless they are introduced. Nobody can get a partner without being introduced."

"But I must take care that they are introduced," said the distressed Mrs. Dermont. "Really, Mrs. Knight is such an agreeable person, that she has made me, I fear, quite negligent of my duty. Have the kindness to excuse me for a moment."

So saying, Mrs. Dermont hastened towards a group of gentlemen, one of whom wore a red coat, and, as if determined to atone in the most effectual way for her past forgetfulness, she at once selected him as the object of her mission, saying, with all the gentle authority of an hostess, "Will you permit me, sir, to introduce you to a partner? I have a young friend yonder, whom I wish to see dancing."

Had this proposal been made by any body, save the mistress of the fête, Captain

Waters, the unlucky gentleman to whom it was addressed, would certainly have declined it ; for he was in truth holding himself in readiness to offer his hand for the next dance, to Miss Janet Murray. But, as it was, to refuse was impossible, and he therefore yielded himself, with the best grace he could, to the lady's guidance ; and, thinking that the sooner his task began, the sooner it would be ended, he had his arm round the substantial waist of the delighted Celestina, and was whirling her onward to her heart's content, in as short a time as possible.

George Marsh too, used his utmost diligence in the execution of the mission with which he was charged, and so well did he succeed, that he reached the bench on which he had left his fainting sister, about two minutes after she had left it. His first sensation, on perceiving her place vacant, was alarm. " Good Heaven ! She must have again fainted !" he exclaimed, " and has probably been carried to the house. Do you happen to know—" he was beginning, addressing himself to one or two persons

who were standing near him, when the affectionate inquiry was suddenly cut short by the apparition of Celestina herself, whirling rapidly, passed him, on the arm of Captain Waters, her eyes emitting sparks of rapture, and a triumphant smile, displaying her large teeth from ear to ear.

George Marsh stood for a moment, as if he had been turned to stone. But his recovery from this trance was any thing but painful. "Poor girl!" he mentally exclaimed, "How truly did she say, that she had reason to be thankful to Heaven for the elasticity of spirits, which enables her thus to forget one moment, what had wrung her heart the last! It is, indeed, a blessing that many may envy—and, though to me, utterly incomprehensible, I will study most assiduously never to say, or do any thing that may check it."

He paused for a moment, still holding the glass of wine and water in his hand, while she continued with the strenuous activity for which her dancing was so remarkable, to do battle with the breeze, and the grass-plot, till, both her warrior-partner and herself

having no breath left, came to a dead stop just before him.

Among various other peculiarities in her manner of waltzing, Miss Celestina Marsh had one, upon the invention of which she rather piqued herself. This consisted in retaining possession of the arm of her partner, during those intervals of rest, which the formation of the human lungs renders necessary. It was, therefore, in this attitude, and, in a manner which perhaps naturally suggested the idea of her requiring support, that she now stood before her tenderly observant brother, without, however, being at all conscious of his vicinity. Indeed, she was at that moment, too pleasantly occupied in saying lively things to the captain, to have any attention to spare for other objects.

George watched her for a moment, to assure himself that her hilarity was genuine, and not the result of any over-wrought attempt to conquer feelings, which perhaps stung her to the quick, even as she smiled. As far, however, as it was possible for a looker-on to judge, Celestina was, really and

truly, in the happiest state of mind imaginable; her features, voice, and gesture, being almost unequivocally demonstrative of delight.

It was not, however, in the young man's nature to believe it possible that she could have brought her feelings thus wonderfully under her control, without a struggle, that must perforce have shaken her severely, and it was in a voice of most gentle tenderness, that, after withdrawing her eyes for a moment from the face of her partner, by touching her on the shoulder, he said, "My dearest Celestina! I hope that you are not over-exerting yourself?"

To which she replied, in a tone of great vivacity, "Good gracious! George, what nonsense you do talk! What in the world could put it into your head that a waltz was likely to hurt me?"

Then suddenly, as it seemed, recollecting what had passed between them somewhat less than half an hour before, she looked with a comical air of intelligence in his face, and added, in a whisper uttered close to

his ear, "You need not look so dismal about it, George. It is not one man that will break my heart, I promise you. But you have brought the wine and water, I see; well, you are a good fellow for that, and it would be a monstrous pity it should be wasted."

Whereupon she seized the glass with a very cordial grasp, and having drained it to the last drop, returned it to him, saying, "Thankye, George; now get out of the way, there's a good fellow, — I'm ready, Captain Waters." And away she sprung, leaving George with the glass in his hand, and his eyes fixed upon the ground, meditating on the wondrous varieties of human nature; but blessing Heaven in his heart that, notwithstanding all the disadvantages of his unfortunate sister, it did not seem likely that he should have to endure the intense misery of seeing her sink into the grave, with her heart broken by disappointed affection.

His meditation was interrupted by the offer of a servant who was passing, to take

the glass he held; and as he raised his eyes while he gave it to him, he encountered those of Charlotte Verepoint fixed upon him. It was not the first time that day that strong emotion had sent a crimson glow to the temples of George Marsh, but it *was* the first in which the sensation had been accompanied with pleasure instead of pain. Yet did it not seem that the poor young man was as unfortunate in reality, as his sister was in his imagination? For the first eyes he had ever looked at with pleasure had soon closed upon him in death; and another pair, which had of late, by gentle degrees, almost taught him to forget that he had ever before accounted any eyes worth looking at, were found, poor youth, in the head of the only heiress for twelve miles round Overby! But as yet he had scarcely dared to confess to himself that he considered this as a misfortune; for as yet he had never dared to confess to his own heart that it was possible any imaginable combination of circumstances could bring him within reach of possessing an angel. Nothing of all this, however, oc-

curred to him at the present moment, for Charlotte Verepoint smiled when she met his eye, and George Marsh was by her side in an instant, and then for a flying hour or so, that seemed fledged all over with full-grown wings, he felt that a gathering together of neighbours on a bright day, with a smooth lawn, and a military band, might be a very pleasant thing indeed.

CHAPTER X.

A GOOD deal of very superior conversation passed between Mrs. Stephens and her husband's American friend, Mr. Holingsworth, during the course of Colonel Dermont's fête; but I regret to say, that though it contained much which *might* prove exceedingly interesting, and *must* prove excessively instructive, I cannot bestow it in detail upon my readers, because I have a great many other things to tell them, for which I shall not find time, if I go too much at length into the record of their philosophy. I will only observe that nothing less notorious than the passionate devotion of Mrs. Stephens to her husband could have saved

her on this occasion from the imputation of making a vehement attack upon the heart of Mr. Holingsworth; for her earnest and incessant speaking to him, together with the expressive gesticulations she employed, as she hung upon his arm, and discoursed on the beautiful nature of the human soul, and of the "ripening aspect" which it was beginning to wear in the United States, certainly did give her the appearance of paying him very particular attention. But Mr. Stephens was not at all jealous; on the contrary, he seemed rather to enjoy being left to himself than not, and wandered about making gallant little bows and clever little speeches to all the ladies he met, very much with the air of a man who was particularly enjoying himself.

Celestina Marsh, meanwhile, so managed matters during the five separate though not successive bouts of waltzing with which the gallant Captain Waters indulged her, that although he came to the ground half determined to make very earnest love to pretty Janet Murray, he began to doubt, before he

left it, whether, as the riotous manufacturers had returned to their work, and the detachments were soon likely to be sent off, it might not answer better, in the way of amusement, to cement the friendly intimacy to which the manners of his animated partner so frankly invited him, than to give, and perhaps to take, a heartach as a keepsake between himself and the gentle Janet. So this time, contrary to all human probabilities, the captain's much-admired little favourite went home with the tear in her eye, and her young heart as heavy as lead; while George Marsh's tenderly bepitied sister, notwithstanding the barbarous cruelty of Ensign Wheeler, made Mrs. Verepoint's carriage dance on its springs by the joyous step with which she entered it when the fête was over. To few, indeed, is the finale of any entertainment as perfectly satisfactory as was that of the Mount to her, which will be intelligible to all feeling hearts by the last few words which preceded her departure.

"Now, George, now, ask him to spend the whole day with us on Thursday, and say

about the fishing, you know, and all that," whispered Celestina to her brother as the carriage drew up.

"Ask who? Celestina!" he replied, with a look of renewed dismay, and gently disengaging his own from the too precious little hand, which, as the colonel was escorting Mrs. Verepoint, was still permitted to make him as supremely happy as it had done during more than one delicious hour of that strangely varied day. "Ask who? Mr. Wheeler is gone away with Mrs. Morris."

"What a fool you are, George," returned his sister, now, in her turn, resigning a beloved arm, in order to speak with more freedom. "How can you be such an idiot as to suppose I wanted to have any more to say to that wretch, Wheeler! Can't you see who I mean, George?" and she certainly gave what was a very intelligible side-long glance towards the captain. "Ask him, I tell you, for Thursday," and without awaiting his reply, she suddenly repossessed herself of the arm of her gay partner, and leading him forward said, "Give me leave

roduce my brother to you, Captain
s—Mr. Tremayne Marsh."

er the necessary quantity of bowing
aking hands, the distressed proprietor
eklow Wood stammered an invitation
ay's fishing on the following Thursday,
ich he received a most gracious accept-
rom the greatly amused young officer;
hen it was that Mrs. Verepoint and her
ter, having stood aside to make way
e entrance of their triumphant guest
eir carriage, the vehicle responded, as
en related above, to the joyous bound
enviably happy Celestina.

onel Dermont then placed Mrs. Vere-
looking a little graver than usual, next
after which George Marsh, having
for a moment, repossessed himself of
ughter's hand, assisted her to take her
n the carriage, and then followed, and
himself next to her. But the light
had beamed upon him during the
hours of the day, seemed suddenly
ind a heavy evening cloud.

he moment when Celestina had made

her last imperative demand upon him for an invitation, poor George and the fair heiress were earnestly conversing together upon subjects, perhaps hardly less sublime than some of those which had occupied Mrs. Stephens and Mr. Holingsworth; only there was this difference between them, that the two young people were both conversing solely for the pleasure of listening, each of them, to what the other should say; whereas the elder pair conversed altogether for the pleasure of admiring, each of them, all that they should say themselves. And during the time that the young pair had thus conversed together, which, to say the truth, was certainly the greatest part of the day, they of course occasionally looked at each other; and when they did so, there was nothing in the eyes of Charlotte Verepoint at all calculated to make George Marsh remember the immense distance there was between them in point of fortune; nor was there a trace left in the manner of George of that painful sort of embarrassment which sometimes, when he himself too well remembered this tremendous distance, hung about

n like a heavy mist, obscuring the glorious
elligence and beautiful refinement of his
aracter, and giving him too much the ap-
pearance of excessive shyness, to leave him
te a fair chance of being valued at his
rth. Both of them, in short, had seemed
have forgotten during that bright fête on
onel Dermont's lawn, that there was any
son whatever why, their families having
n for ages such near neighbours, and in-
ate acquaintance, they too, should not be
best friends in the world.

ut now, all this was over. Mrs. Vere-
t said a few obliging things in praise of
pretty fête, but was speedily reduced to
nce by the vehement acquiescence of Ce-
na, whose clamorous admiration of the
ble affair produced the only sounds heard
ing the rest of the drive. Charlotte
ke not a single word; and once, when
erge, addressed her by name, so distinctly
o oblige her, in some sort, to turn her
towards him, there was an expression of
a profound melancholy in it, that all

courage forsook him, and he became as totally silent as herself.

Had poor George known only a little of what was passing in the heart of the heiress, it is possible that, all unselfish as he was, he might have transferred a portion of the tender pity which he felt for his sister, to himself.

Charlotte Verepoint, young as she was, and essentially gentle as by her nature she must ever be, had been brought up with too complete a knowledge of the perfect independence of her position, not to feel that she was, and ought to be, in all points of real importance to her happiness, her own mistress. That she did feel this had been already proved by her having refused no less than three very eligible proposals of marriage, to neither of which her mother, as she candidly confessed, could see any objection, and that without giving any better reason than that she liked better to remain unmarried. But as this declaration on her part was never accompanied by any protestations of intending to remain unmarried for ever,

Verepoint appeared perfectly willing to have her own way, never lecturing on the subject at all, except now and then to give her a hint that she rather feared of place was her besetting sin, and to tell her to keep watch over herself in respect, because the feeling was one might, if suffered to become too strong, have the very worst effects upon the cha-

these remonstrances Charlotte had accustomed to listen, either in respectance, or with the gentle expression of hope that she should not suffer any feeling to get undue influence over her. But of Charlotte's complexion had varied a good deal when her mother had expressed any of these fears—for of late the meditative girl had become perfectly aware of the fact that she was beset by a danger of a totally opposite description. Charlotte Verepoint had at the time quite ceased from the vain attempt of persuading herself that what she felt for George Marsh was any thing short of love and love of so well-founded, firm, and

devoted a nature, that there was very little hope it would ever be cured, or even weakened. She was too, little less certain of his sentiments than of her own, and had, in short, quite made up her mind to the inconvenient truth, that there was no chance of happiness for either, save in their union. That Charlotte's mother was mistaken in attributing to her a too strong propensity to pride of place, is certain, nevertheless, if only to avoid the disagreeable certainty of her doings being canvassed and censured, Charlotte wished with all her heart that she could have reversed the value of their respective estates; but as far as money was concerned, this was *all* she wished, and she certainly did not intend that the impossibility of achieving it should destroy the happiness of her life. As to the respective races from which the estates descended, that of Tremayne was in every way equal to that of Verepoint—so no difficulty lay there. Moreover, as to any opposition on the part of her admirable mother, Charlotte knew that she had nothing to fear. Once convinced that the every-way estimable

George Marsh was the object of her affection. She felt perfectly satisfied that her willingness would be given to their marriage.

Then why was Charlotte Verepoint so

Why did she herself suffer, and why did she make one dearer than herself suffer, by the dreadfulness of the anxiety arising from uncertainty of purpose? Strange, indeed, that Charlotte Verepoint, of all the women in the world, should be breaking her heart solely because she did not know her own mind! Charlotte Verepoint! the most sensible, the most reasonable, the most prudent little creature of twenty years that ever the sun shone upon. Perfectly certain that she could never love any man than George Marsh — perfectly certain that he loved her, as she wished to be loved by the man of her choice — perfectly certain that she could easily win her father's consent, and that they should neither of them ever wish for greater wealth or higher station than that which was within their reach; — with all this to render her fate

one of the most happy and the most assured that ever mortal woman saw before her, Charlotte Verepoint was breaking her heart because she could not make up her mind to decide whether her love to the brother, or her antipathy to the sister, were the stronger.

This doubt, and this alone, had destroyed her peace of mind, and was in fact undermining her health, and poisoning her existence.

This statement may seem to indicate a greater power of being "a good hater," than is quite consistent with the sweet and gentle nature of Charlotte Verepoint; but no one can be quite a fair judge of the case without being thoroughly acquainted with the respective characters of both brother and sister. Poor Charlotte had not greatly blundered in her estimate of either; and though it might have been fairly anticipated that in a young and loving heart the tenderer feeling would soon have got the better in such a struggle, and have conquered its sterner but less immortal-natured opponent, the fact that it was otherwise only tended to prove the

ence of Charlotte's nature. It was in-
y more for her mother's sake than her
hat she shrunk with such shuddering
from the idea of a union which must
brought her gracious, graceful, and
ndulgent parent into perpetual contact
Celestina Marsh. And therefore it was
Charlotte Verepoint would sometimes
e very painfully red, and at others
ickly pale, when her mother lectured
the necessity of not cherishing even
rtuous and noble pride derived from
stained descent, to a degree that might
ger the Christian humility of heart,
no one can lose sight of without sin;
e knew, in the secret recesses of her
young heart, that nothing but the
lly cherishing every feeling which led
o revolt from coarse sentiments and
manners, could save the dear unsus-
s lecturer from the closest connexion
what she felt to be an epitome of both.

* * * *

we must leave poor Charlotte to
her way between the two violently

opposed feelings which thus beset her, and return to the Mount and to Alfred Dermont, who, however much my wandering away from him may have left the matter in doubt, is the real hero of my tale. Nor was it from inadvertence that I ran away from him. I introduced him as a child, and it was necessary that I should give him time to grow up, without keeping the reader's eye fixed upon him during the whole process; a thousand post-octavo pages being by no means sufficient to recount the actions of both boy and man.

Perhaps the first hour in which a youth becomes conscious of being heartily in love, is as good a one as can be found for such an historian as I am to mark the transition from boy to man; and if so, the fête given at the Mount when Alfred Dermont was twenty years of age, is precisely the proper epoch at which to commence the record of his manly adventures. His young eye, indeed, had before that time paid homage due to the beauty of Amelia Thorwold; but it was only then that his admiration

ned the character of love, and that the
asion that unless he could obtain her
s wife, life could, under no circum-
es, be worth enduring, first took pos-
n of his mind.

ere was a great deal of natural energy
fervour in the character of Alfred,
a, had his education been a wholesome
would have tended to render all his
qualities active and efficient, and given
strength and courage to combat and
er his failings. As it was, however,
fect of this energy was very different,
ng itself chiefly in resolute determina-
of making all persons and all things
rvient to his will.

d this Amelia Thorwold, whom my
was thus determined to win, or die,
she not at this moment be accurately
bed to the reader? She must, and, to
est of my power, she shall. Amelia
wold was at this time—start not, my
young grown-up beauties, but rather
e to learn that she was still in the full
ian blaze of loveliness — twenty-nine

years old; but nobody that looked at her ever thought of asking themselves, or any body else, *how* old she might be. "How beautiful!" was the thought and the exclamation that she invariably inspired; and if any particularly speculative and cold-hearted individual, male or female, did, after looking at her, find themselves sufficiently in possession of their ordinary faculties to ask, "How old is she?" the answers were probably as various as the hearers. But the most spiteful she-critic in existence, no, not even Celestina Marsh herself, would have dreamed (unless the fact were known to them) of approaching within half a dozen years of the truth.

All casual observers, or rather all who were not habitually philosophical physiognomists, believed her to be indisputably under twenty. There was an almost infantine purity of skin, and general absence of strong expression, which together, produced the delusive effect of early youth, and it was only occasionally in the *maturer* expression of the eye, that a deeply-skilled observer might

what was neither so very young nor so lovely as its liquid lustre showed to the world in general.

In stature she was a little, a very little, above the common height of women; and this little ceased to be remarkable, except when she stood surrounded by more than ordinary mortals, because the symmetry of her form was so perfect, that it was almost incredible the eye could detect any thing out of the common way in its proportions, as if they had never looked upon any thing so faultless before. Her features were so evenly well-formed, and though delicate and harmonious, had a certain firmness of structure, which insured long life to their beauty; while the still more striking indication of both age and youth, usually afforded by the complexion, was in her so deficient from its exquisite and enduring fairness, that it really was almost impossible to believe that it had been exposed even to the intense sun of England, for twenty-nine years.

Her eyes, of a dark hazel, were so clear and lustrous, their brightness being

greatly increased by the warm, yet delicate carnation of her cheek. Whether that carnation were altogether the work of nature, or of an artificer in some sort more cunning still, is a question too delicate to admit of a direct answer. If there *were* any rouge in the case, it really was administered with such consummate skill, as might almost have left the artist herself in doubt as to whether she owed any thing to it or not. Her mouth was peculiarly small, though the lips were full, and of so rich a tint, that a ruby, even without being envious, must really have looked pale if placed beside them. The teeth were small, even, and of ivory whiteness. The colour of her exquisitely formed neck and arms was almost as purely snow as that of her fair forehead itself. Yet all this exquisite beauty of colouring would have greatly lost in effect if her hair had been of any shade in the world but what it was. A red-haired sort of horse is called chesnut, and all sorts of hair, from the pale young carrot tint up to fiery red, have been honoured by the same epithet. But if, gentle

der, you will take a real chesnut, a real
ht, brown, shining Spanish chesnut, and
y a magnificent profusion of silky hair
isely of that colour, you may obtain a cor-
idea of the *chevelure* of Amelia Thorwold.
h, as far as outward form is concerned,
the woman who now held the very heart
soul of young Alfred Dermont captive ;
light and lovely as the flowery chain
ch bound him seemed to be, he already
its power paramount over every other
m, whether of affection or duty, which
ld be made upon him. In a word, he
vehemently in love—and for the first
e.

When the Mount family assembled at
akfast on the morning after the fête, the
nel and Mrs. Dermont were both of
m in excellent spirits. Every thing, as
y repeatedly told each other, had gone
more than well—every thing had gone
brilliantly. To people with their esta-
hment, and holding their station in life,
success, as they said, had of course
hing very surprising in it : nevertheless,

it was impossible to help being pleased at witnessing the great admiration and animated delight of the whole neighbourhood.

"Certainly, I never did see a set of people so perfectly delighted," observed Mrs. Dermont.

"What you say is quite true, my dear," returned the colonel; "I observed the same myself; and I must say it was all very natural, for the scene was one of very great splendour and beauty. You too, Julia," he added, gaily tapping the cheek of his young ward, "you, too, seemed to enjoy it, I thought, not a little. I never before saw you look so well or so gay."

"Enjoy it, sir? Good gracious! how was it possible to help enjoying it?" replied Julia, with great animation. "It is saying very little of it for a girl like me to declare that I never saw any thing one thousandth part so beautiful in my whole life before—because my young little life has been so short, you know. But it is not I only, who said it: every body—yes, I do believe every body, one after another, kept on

the very same words. Oh! you tell how many I heard exclaiming that had never seen any thing so beautiful in their lives."

All this joyous and triumphant sort of thing seemed in no degree to reach the heart of the house. He, beyond comparison the most important person who had been present at the fête, he alone seemed to take pleasure in discussing its beauty and re-echoing its splendour. While his father, mother, and Julia Drummond, continued to talk of the evening concerning all that had passed, he remained at the breakfast-table profoundly silent, seemingly to feel a relief in keeping his mind occupied upon the newspaper, instead of attending to, or joining with, them.

Having thus assumed the appearance of being occupied, kept him for some time from being annoyed by having any words said to himself which required an answer; but at length his mother could no longer resist her very earnest desire to hear him say something upon the subject which so constantly engrossed them all, and play-

fully laying her spread hand upon the newspaper, she said, "Set by the newspaper for one moment, my dearest Alfred, and tell us whether you did not think every thing went off particularly well yesterday?"

"Went off?" repeated Alfred, with a most tremendous sigh.

"Yes, dearest!" said his mother; "don't you think it was really brilliant?"

"Brilliant?" again repeated Alfred.

"Why, my dearest boy, what can you be thinking of? Have you forgotten our yesterday's fête?" demanded his puzzled parent.

"It is not very likely, ma'am, that I should forget it," replied the young man, in an accent of great solemnity.

"Don't plague him so, Mrs. Dermont," said the colonel, a little annoyed at his son's apathetic indifference to what he thought ought to interest him more than the newspaper, yet feeling it easier to blame any body and every body than him; "it is very tormenting to be talked to, my dear, when one is reading the newspaper. But I

less that our dear boy's silence does look little as if he had not much enjoyed the party, and if so, I promise you that it is the last of the kind that will ever be given. Tell the truth at once, Alfred: you did not enjoy it—did you?"

"Not enjoy the party!" exclaimed the young man, vehemently; "do you think, sir, I did not enjoy it? Gracious Heaven, what an idea! Never, never did I know it was to live till yesterday; and to-morrow another such day I would willingly, and gladly, consent to sacrifice the half of my life for it!"

"Nay, then, my dearest Alfred, be very sure that you shall have as many more like this, if the nature of our changeable climate permits," returned the devoted father, smiling. "I don't suppose," he continued, "that it would do for us to send out invitations again directly, because it would look very odd, you know, as we never happened to do such a thing before; but trust me, Alfred, every soul that was here yesterday, down to the little drummer-boy,

shall be invited again as soon as it is at all possible we can set about it."

"Every soul!" ejaculated Alfred, with a groan.

"My darling boy, what is the matter with you?" cried his mother, in sudden alarm. "I am positively sure that you are not well—let me feel your pulse, Alfred! Do not draw away your hand, Alfred!—I am frightened to death!—I am indeed, colonel—I think he was over-fatigued yesterday, and that he is feverish—I am quite sure he is feverish!"

"I believe you mean to drive me mad, ma'am!" exclaimed the impetuous young man, suddenly rising. "Come with me, Julia; I have something to say to you."

Though pretty well accustomed to the whims and to the impetuosity of Alfred, as well as to his uncereemonious calls upon her time and attention, under all circumstances, Julia was startled by this sudden summons, and a bright blush mounted to her cheek as she obeyed it—for she did obey it instantly, rising from her chair almost as suddenly as

ad done from his, and leaving the room
him without exchanging even a glance
r with the colonel or his lady, by way
asking for leave to do so—for well she
y that any delay in obeying the behests
lfred, was a fault for which no defer-
to them could atone ; and at that mo-
she would not have been inclined to
obedience to any will which would
interfered with obedience to his.

CHAPTER XI.

IN order to render the ensuing conversation between Alfred Dermont and Julia Drummond, perfectly intelligible, it will be necessary to raise the veil by which the young girl's heart was concealed, in some degree even from herself, but most wholly and completely from every other mortal eye. The two young people of whom I am about to speak, had been reared together with a greater degree of constant association and companionship than often occurs between boys and girls, even of the same family ; for Alfred had never been at school, and very nearly all his studies,

l as all his pastimes, had been shared
Julia.

en young people, whether of the
family or not, are thus closely brought
together, a certain degree of familiar in-
tercourse, and, in the great majority of cases,
a certain degree of familiar affection springs
up between them. Where the parties are
brother and sister, these kindly feelings are
naturally strengthened as they increase in
age, by a consciousness of duty and of fit-
ness; but where there is no such relation to
begeth, as it were, what the lasting senti-
ment ought to be, a multitude of varying,
and of contradictory sentiments, are within
their reach, rendering the nature of their
relations relative to each other as uncertain
as possible.

In most cases, this situation will be settled
by the mutual feelings of the parties, in
which it is most probable that there will be
a great deal of sympathy; but in the case
of love it was otherwise. Excepting that
the heart of each there was what may be
said to be a broad foundation of good-will to-

wards the other, there was about as little sympathy as possible. Julia's affection for Alfred so completely predominated over every other earthly attachment in her heart, that every day, every hour, every moment, was tinctured by it ; whereas, the affection of Alfred for Julia produced little or no effect upon his existence sufficiently strong for him to be himself conscious of its influence.

Had she been suddenly snatched away by death, or by any other accident, he would probably have been a good deal surprised to find how much he missed her ; but as this did not happen, and as it did not enter his head that any such event possibly might happen, his mind never rested for a moment in meditation either on her or it.

He had heard, as long as he could remember to have heard any thing, first, that he was the very loveliest child ; next, that he was the most magnificent boy ; and last, that he was the most superbly handsome man, that nature had ever contrived to form. He might be more properly said to

all this, than to believe it, because because implies the possibility of doubt, in this case no such possibility existed.

In the same manner he had as constantly heard of the same early period of his existence, that Julia Drummond was a very plain little girl, and on this point too he might rather choose to know, than to believe—at any rate he would have told you so himself—that Julia Drummond *was* a very plain little girl.

Meanwhile, Julia, on her side, had received the same unvarnished statements as he had done, and her convictions of their truth amounted in her case, as to the degree of certainty which is commonly denominated knowledge.

She knew perfectly well that she was a plain little thing, and she knew also that her father was the most finished model of that human eyes ever looked upon. It would be folly to attempt tracing the influence of which these respective convictions were seated on the minds, tempers, manners, and dispositions, of the two young people ; for such examination would, of a surety,

I. Q

incur the double danger of really attributing too little, and seeming to attribute too much to it. But among a variety of other consequences produced by their ever-present agency was, as might be expected, a total absence of personal vanity on one side, and a most remarkable abundance of it on the other.

But though the absence of this peculiar weakness produced all the good effects on Julia which every rational observer of human character will be likely to anticipate, its abounding presence in poor Alfred had, from another peculiarity of his nature, a less blighting effect than might have been expected.

With all his faults, and they were as numerous as might be expected from his education, with all his faults Alfred Dermont had a warmly affectionate heart; and although this quality, like every other, was coloured, and sometimes almost distorted, by the medium of variety through which he looked at every thing, it nevertheless, from the innate excellence of its own precious

would often seem to reflect back
ing of brightness even on the vapid-
vanity itself—for there was certainly
ing touching in the absolute faith he
every expression of admiration, liking,
ill, or attachment that was expressed
s him. These kindly feelings he, of
believed to be universal, and not un-
tly had he said to Julia, when specu-
upon their various friends and ac-
nce, “I really wish, Julia, that I
like and love every body as much as
ke and love me. But this *is* impossi-
t not? And it cannot be considered
ault, I hope, can it?”

! dear Alfred,” she would say in
shaking her little black head, and
, she did not well know why. “No!
an be no fault in not doing what it is
not in your power to do.”

this assurance satisfied him, and he
n from year to year, with the most
icious conviction that all the fine
said to propitiate the favour of his
and mother, were neither more nor

less than spontaneous and irrepressible expressions of the immense affection of the speakers towards himself—affection which, as he and Julia agreed, he could not reasonably be expected to return, but which he was ever ready to reward by the most undoubting belief in its sincerity.

The result of all this was, that long before little Julia knew she had a heart, that heart was filled with love for Alfred—love made up of every feeling that woman's nature in its sweetest, tenderest perfection can concentrate upon one only, and wholly beloved object; and that Alfred looked upon her as only one of the multitude who, from the inferiority of their nature to his own, were, as it seemed, constrained to look up to him with unbounded admiration and love, and at the same time incapable of inspiring an adequate return from him.

Of all these involuntary adorers he might, perhaps, be conscious that Julia was the favourite; but if asked to explain this, he would probably have accounted for it from the circumstance of her having been so constantly in attendance upon him. He

deed, often said to his mother, that he had been so long used to Julia, that he could not say," he thought the not having to wait upon him would be one great advantage for his not choosing to go to college. It was not till the hour in which Alfred beheld the startling beauty of Amelia that he conceived the possibility of loving another, as much as every body admired him. As long as he remained in her presence at this first interview, his feeling might almost literally be said to be in his eyes, and most assuredly it was at that time that he had ever found out the exquisite pleasure the sense of sight could convey.

His first interview was not immediately followed by others; the young lady returned to the house of Mrs. Knight to pay a few weeks to a family in a neighbouring county, and Alfred, secretly feeling a degree of indignation at her choosing to place herself, after once seeing him, where there was no chance of seeing him, remained with an extremely vivid re-

membrance of her personal charms stamped upon his fancy, but with a sort of latent feeling of displeasure also, which sufficed, during this interval, to prevent any idea of falling in love with her from entering his head.

In fact, he scarcely thought her worthy of it, strongly suspecting that a too intense consciousness of her own charms had rendered her incapable of appreciating the perfections of others.

There was something in this exceedingly repugnant to his feelings, and he persuaded himself that he remembered Miss Thorwold with no more emotion than if she had been a picture or a statue.

The moment, however, that he saw her step forth in her goddess-like beauty upon the lawn at the Mount, he began to feel that he had under-rated her power. His heart beat, his limbs trembled, his voice faltered ; but by degrees, this new-born timidity gave place to the equally new-born rapture of throwing his arm around her in the waltz, of feeling her eyes fixed in gentle languish-

ment upon his, and of hearing her whisper a thousand pretty nothings in his ear ; the principal charm of which consisted in their being inaudible to every one else.

All this, at twenty years old, will go far towards making almost any young man fancy himself in love ; but to a youth like Alfred Dermont, who had been nursed in a perfect hot-bed for bringing every germ of will, and whim, to prompt maturity, it was sufficient to put his soul in a tumult of passion, which led, in the course of a few hours, to the fixed and very resolute determination of making the young lady his wife. On this resolution he had both waked and slept, and the consequence was, that he arose in the morning with the intention of immediately communicating it, all ripe and ready for execution as it was, to his honoured parents.

As to any possibility of their opposing his intention of marrying Miss Thorwold, and of marrying her immediately, it never entered his head ; his tranquillity, therefore, was in no degree disturbed on that score ; but although his parents had thus satisfac-

torily succeeded in teaching him that he never need fear any opposition to his will from them, they had not been able so completely to conquer the natural feelings of youth in all things as to prevent a sensation of timid bashfulness (quite as new to him as even the passion of love) from mixing itself with his purpose of disclosing his wishes and intentions—and it was this bashfulness which made him now desire the attendance of Julia, in the manner related at the conclusion of the last chapter.

CHAPTER XII.

was to his own pretty quiet little study, equally elegant and comfortable by the careful and industrious agency of Julia, Alfred now led the way, Julia following her as she knew not what, causing her heart to beat almost audibly.

"Open the door, Julia," said Alfred.

The door was shut, and Julia stood, very much not to tremble, immediately within it. "Pray sit down, Julia," said Alfred, "how foolish it is of you to stand!—How do you suppose I can see you in that way?" Julia was seated immediately, but it was on a chair so nearly identical with that on which Alfred had placed

himself, that he could scarcely see her. "Why, Julia!" repeated Alfred, in a voice that proved that he was not less agitated than herself, "I want to speak to you as a friend, and you run away and hide yourself, as if you were a naughty little girl, afraid of being scolded;—but I am not going to scold you, Julia." Alfred spoke with gentleness, and almost in a whisper—yet still it was easy to perceive that he was greatly agitated.

He was indeed, agitated, and very naturally too, considering the, to him, extremely novel subject upon which he was about to speak. But why was Julia agitated? She, who had been used, for more years than she could remember, to listen to all Alfred's secrets, and to hear with unwearying sympathy every thing he chose to say to her, because he did not choose to say it to any body else—why did Julia tremble now, when she had never trembled before?

I am almost ashamed to tell—young ladies, that is quite grown-up young ladies, of eighteen, nineteen, twenty, and so on, will

think her so very silly. But they must find enough to remember that Julia was sixteen and a half, and it may, perhaps, be well to mention two or three little circumstances which had occurred the day before, and which may perhaps, in some slight degree excuse her.

In the first place, it was only the day before, that poor Julia, for the first time in her life, began to doubt whether it was quite right that she should continue all her life to be as she had been while a child. She felt, at the very least, as much surprise and pleasure, when she overheard one of the young guests say to another, "Who is that devilish pretty little girl with the white hair in her black hair?" Had there been anybody else wearing a white camilla with black hair, Julia would never for a moment have imagined that they were speaking of her; but there was not, and moreover, the young man addressed replied to the question, "I have just been asking the same question, and was told that she was a ward

of the colonel's, and that her name's Drummond." So there could be no mistake. But that was not all, if it had been, the effect of the pleasing novelty would have been infinitely less profound. No ! it was not all, nor nearly all which had occurred yesterday to give birth to hopes which only the day before would have appeared to her mind, had they crossed it, as wilder than any fable that ever was invented. She had heard Alfred say, Alfred himself, who scarcely ever allowed that any one was well-looking, she had heard Alfred say to his mother, in the early part of the day, before he had begun to dance with Miss Thorwold, "How very pretty Julia Drummond looks ! You must never let her hide her beautiful eyes and forehead again."

Is there any body so unfortunately old as to have forgotten what it is to have been sixteen and a half ? If not, every body will hear with indulgence that those words produced an effect upon Julia as completely disproportioned to their value and their

ing, as the spark which set fire to the
es of Parliament was to the conflagra-
which followed.

or little girl ! She did not look quite
iculous as Malvolio, when engaged in
mplating the cross-gartering which he
d would be so irresistible to his mis-
but she was scarcely less deluded,
standing before her glass on the morn-
er the fête, she carefully combed away
in-like dark locks which had hereto-
o heavily shaded the ivory forehead
h them, and fancied that when they
breakfast, Alfred might again look at
rehead, and those eyes, and again
that they were "beautiful."

ever, it ought to be remembered, in
ion of her folly, that she now herself
he discovery, and really for the first
hat her eyes *were* very particularly
dark, brilliant, and beautiful; and as
magnificent eyes looked back at her, as
zed at them, she mentally exclaimed,
what a lucky thing it will be for me
ed really does care about eyes ! How

often I have read about eyes doing mischief and wounding hearts, and thought it such stuff!—But there may be some meaning, and some truth too, in it. Oh! if it were indeed, and indeed possible that Alfred could love me!”

Such meditations have been, still are, and ever will be, quite sufficient, at sixteen and a half, to set the fancy galloping through all the possible and impossible chances which lead to happy love, leaving the stricken one in a fool's paradise, where, for some short space, a few hours, perhaps, neither doubt nor fear can enter.

So was it with little Julia; and when she placed herself in the chair that was almost behind Alfred, she did so to avoid the too vehement emotion which she knew she should feel, when he should say that he loved her with lover's love, and wanted her to love him in the same manner in return.

These were the thoughts which made Julia tremble when Alfred said that he was not going to scold her; and when he stretched out his hand in order to draw her

ds him, she really felt, poor child, as if
must certainly faint, fall, and perhaps die,
scene continued much longer.

ppily, however, for poor Julia's de-
Alfred was in no condition either to
stand, or indeed in the slightest degree
ceive what was going on in her young
a. It was nothing new to him, poor
to be thinking too much of himself,
s own feelings, to leave him any power
covering those of other people; and now,
upon for the first time by one of the
powerful passions to which human
is exposed, and embarrassed, not so
even by timidity, as by the unwonted
ence of his own sensations, it was not
wonderful that he was as utterly un-
ous of her being agitated at all, as if
ad been the ill-placed chair itself, in-
of its occupant.

not even the fear of fainting, falling,
ing, could overcome the habitual com-
e of Julia with every intimation of her
companion's will; and almost before he

had finished speaking, she had changed her place, and was seated close beside him.

"Oh! Julia! Julia!" began the young man, "we have read together of the power of love, but without either of us, I believe, ever forming any rational idea of what it meant,—but with me, dearest Julia! this calm, this ignorance, this peaceable indifference, is over for ever and for ever!" And Alfred wrung her little hand with all the vehemence of strong emotion as he spoke.

But, happily, again, it was only one of his hands that was thus engaged; the other was pressed, with equal energy of muscle, against his forehead, his eyes being so covered by it as to render him incapable of seeing the tears which were beginning, from excess of agitation, to bedew the burning cheeks of his young companion.

And then he quitted her hand, and resting both his arms on a table which stood before him, buried his face upon them. Oh, how she longed to tell him that he had nothing to fear! Alfred, however, with all

faults and follies was no driveller; he naturally, considerable strength of character and decision of purpose, and after lingering for a very short space to the weakness which had led him to conceal his features, rose up, and standing before Julia, with hands clasped together, he exclaimed, "Alas! I am ten thousand fathom deep in love!"

the thought of Julia at that moment been articulated, it would have sounded "It is come then!" But ere another, its glancing wing could follow it—ere she could even feel that she was thankful for the added, as unconscious of the woful he was about as the plant which distils poison on the hand that approaches it—a million thousand fathom deep in love the angelic, the arch-angelic Amelia would!"

How shall I find any metaphor, any illusion, which shall convey some idea of the tremendous revulsion of feeling which these words produced in the heart of Julia? The apt which occurs to me is comparing it

to the effect produced by suddenly throwing a very large bucket of cold water upon red hot iron ; and I employ it, because it holds good in more ways than one ; for not only did the words of Alfred convert what was glowingly bright, to a state the most completely the reverse, but it rendered strong and firm, that which, the instant before, had been soft, and almost melting.

Yes, this really was as nearly as possible the effect which Alfred's avowal of love for Miss Thorwold produced on the heart of Julia Drummond. Her tears disappeared, she would herself have been greatly at a loss to tell how. Her complexion had quite lost its glow, which is a phenomenon more easily explained ; but what was not so easy, and yet was most undeniably true also, the whole condition of her moral being was changed likewise. She was a child no longer, neither in look, in thought, in word, nor in deed.

Hitherto, she had been the most yielding, and easily led little creature that ever lived, but she was so no more. They say that the

moments of consciousness in a wretch
is drowning, suffice to recall distinctly
his passing soul every event that has oc-
curred to him in the state of existence which
he is about to quit, and somewhat in like
manner did Julia Drummond, at one rapid
glance, review the whole course of weakness
and presumption of which she had been
conscious.

That she, who knew far better than any
other in the world, the superiority of Al-
fred to all other human beings, that she,
with absolutely no pretensions, should have
assumed to think, for a single instant, that
she could dream of mating herself with her,
was a degree of preposterous presumption in
itself, for which a whole life of the strictest self-
denial could be scarcely sufficient to
atone.

"But if not enough, it is all I can offer,"
thought Julia, her heart swelling with
firmness of resolution, "and if I firmly
adhere to my purpose, I may still be worthy
to live, and live his friend;—if not, if I
should have any return of the degrading

madness which seized upon me to-day, I will pray to Heaven that I may be permitted to lie down and die."

It took much less time to make this resolution, than it will do to peruse this record of it; and no sooner was it made, than Julia looked up steadfastly in the face of her friend, and took her first lesson in endurance from the half-mocking, half-playful glance, with which he looked down upon her now pallid features.

"Why, Julia!" he exclaimed, "you are absolutely good for nothing, child, by way of a confidante and comforter. I made you come here with me, because I thought I should like better for you to tell my father and mother that I intend to propose to Miss Thorwold immediately, than have the—the sort of awkwardness of doing it myself; but you look as if you were frightened out of your wits, and instead of your telling them of it, as I wanted you to do, in an easy sort of manner, like any other message from me, I am sure, that if you go to them, looking as marble-like as you do now, they will take

ht at once, and fancy that I am going to the most out-of-the-way thing in the world, instead of the most ordinary and natural. How can you be so very silly, Julia?" Julia attempted to smile in reply to this, but the attempt was injudicious, and it certainly did make her look very strange, and unlike herself.

What in the world is the matter with you, Julia?" said Alfred, looking at her with surprise. "Surely you have not taken into your silly little head that my angelic Amelia is not a proper match for me? As to her fortune, I know nothing about it, and you must tell my father and mother if you will, but I don't care a single straw whether she has a hundred thousand pounds, or not a penny. As to family, we all know that she is very highly connected. And in personal merit, Julia, where, oh! where shall I find any human being equal to her? Tell me, Julia, and be sure that you say exactly what you think, did you ever see any one so heavenly beautiful as Amelia Thorndike?"

"Oh! yes, Alfred—she is very beautiful indeed!" replied Julia, eagerly. "Tell me, only tell me," she added, "exactly what it is you wish me to say to my guardian and Mrs. Dermont, and depend upon it I *will* say it without forgetting a word."

"How can you be such a fool, Julia!" cried the young man, stamping his foot upon the floor, impatiently. "If I wanted them to get the information in my own words, could not I speak them myself? The fact is, Julia, that I am too much agitated to know exactly what to say. You now know the state of the case, my dear, and I want you to tell them that I have made you my confidante, and opened my heart to you—and then you may add, that it is quite clear to you that no power on earth will ever induce me to marry any one else—and that you think she is an angel, and that you wish them joy of their great happiness in having such a daughter—don't you understand, Julia? If all this passes between you and them, you know, all the worst part of the business will be over before I come upon

—and, then, dear souls, they will have to kiss me, and wish me joy—and the rest will be plain sailing, I flatter myself. For I am quite sure, Julia, that she was aware of the impression she had upon me, and oh! that heavenly smile she gave me when we parted! Would it be treason to doubt her tenderness, feeling it fall like a bright sunbeam on my heart? Go, then, my darling girl, go at

For pity sake make the communications quickly as you can, and come back here when you think the proper time for me to make my appearance."

"I will not delay for an instant," said she, and in another moment the door of the room was closed between them.

Julia stood still before the entrance to the dressing-room to recover breath, and to assure herself that she was physically capable of performing the task before her. Of her courage, firmness, and power of conquering the feelings which it had become the duty of her life to conquer, she had no doubts. But she had once in her life—a year before, fainted, in consequence

of sudden terror, on hearing Alfred's gun go off the instant after he had left the breakfast-room, and before it was possible, as she thought, that he could have discharged it purposely. Might not the same sort of thing happen to her again at the moment she had to disclose the news of which she was the messenger?

It was no proof of mental weakness therefore, but on the contrary, showed perfect self-possession, when she turned away from the door which she had raised her hand to open, and quietly, very quietly, walked to the dining-room, which was at the farther extremity of the hall, knowing that water and glasses ever stood ready for use on the side-board. Julia was frightened when she perceived how violently her hand trembled, as she poured out the water, but her most painful sensation at that moment arose from feeling that she was ashamed of herself. The most pungent salts would have been less effectual as a restorative than the stern severity of scorn at her own position, which made her knit her brows angrily for a moment, and then caused her to breathe a

to Heaven, either for speedy death,
power to conquer emotions which must
render her unworthy to live.

She then took the refreshing draught she
went to seek, and was in the act of returning
to its place, when Alfred entered
the room.

He started at seeing her, either from sur-
prise at finding her there at all, or from
thought and more deliberately remarking the
extraordinary paleness of her lips and
features.

"Why are you here, Julia, when you pro-
mise that you would not delay a moment in
delivering my message?" he exclaimed. "And
what in the world is the matter with you?
You look like a ghost, child. And you have
come here to drink water too, as well as my-
self. That I should be a little in need of the
refreshing beverage, is natural enough, but upon
my word, Julia, it is very absurd if you have
put it into your head that you are going
to do something terrible in announcing my
departure to my father and mother. It
is very much as if you thought they

would find fault with my choice. By Heaven if they do——”

“No, no, Alfred! Fear nothing of the kind!” returned Julia, her heart leaping once more for joy—for it was happiness, positive happiness to perceive how utterly free from all suspicion of the truth he was. Free from all power of believing that such wild folly was possible.

“I only came here for water,” she said, “because you called me out of the breakfast-room before I had taken my tea!” The eyes of Alfred were fixed upon her as she spoke, and the consciousness that she had had recourse (probably for the first time in her life,) to a subterfuge, brought so bright and beautiful a flush to her cheeks, that the effect of it, together with the more than common expression, which strong emotion had awakened in her rich dark eyes, made her even to his pre-occupied fancy, look so exceedingly lovely, that he continued to look at her for some time after she had ceased to speak, and the doing so seemed to soothe his spirits, or his temper, for the look of

defiance with which he had just disappeared entirely, and it was one of his own peculiarly beautiful that he said, "Well, well, Julia—I am not going to scold you. You do not know if you wanted any more cold water to run away, there's a good girl, and that you promised. You know that I never bear any thing, that in the very highest degree approaches to suspense."

She smiled at him in return, and was in the room almost before he had ceased speaking.

What would have become of the comfort derived with her, arising from the conviction that her weakness was not, and never to be suspected, had she known that the thought which arranged itself in the mind of Alfred, after her departure, must, if he were sincerely, have run thus :—"If that girl were not still so perfectly a child in heart and mind, I should positively think she had been fancying she was in love with herself. But, thank Heaven, that is exactly impossible. I know that in all

such things, she is as mere a baby as she was a dozen years ago. But when she does grow into a woman, she will be a lovely one."

Yet if Julia was really as reasonable as she appeared to be, this passing thought which had flitted over the mind of Alfred, ought not to have given her any lasting uneasiness, for it was stifled, as soon as born, by the multitude of other and dearer thoughts which had taken possession of him—and the restless impatience with which he paced up and down the room, and then changed his place to the hall, in order to be within reach of the first sound which would announce that the conference was ended, proved clearly enough how his mind was occupied, and that no image, save that of the resplendent Amelia Thorwold, was at all likely to recur to him.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHEN Julia entered the breakfast-room, and the colonel and his lady, naturally, in a state of vehement curiosity to why their son and heir had left their place so abruptly, and why Julia Drummond had been ordered to follow him.

She had sat perfectly still, not having taken the liberty of ringing, to have breakfast things taken away; for so adequate was the manner in which this son had been reared, that his authority over her could be exercised by the very slightest movement; and as they had both waited, when he left the breakfast-table in that abrupt manner which has been de-

scribed, that it was his purpose to come back to it, they would have sat there much longer still, without disturbing the position of his tea-cup, rather than have run the risk of his being disappointed if he *did* come back expecting to find it.

Nor would they, had he now reappeared, have ventured to exhibit their curiosity as to the cause of his absence, in any way that might have looked like expecting that he should give an account of himself ; but questioning Julia was quite another thing, and this they proceeded to do, both at once, and as they did not happen to ask exactly the same questions, the task of answering them with impartial civility, would have been difficult, had not the overwhelming importance of the intelligence she had to communicate, borne down all form and ceremony, and enabled her, without infringing the sort of respectful etiquette to which they were both rather partial, to stop both their questionings, by saying, "I have got something very particular, very unexpected, to tell you. And you must please both of you to listen

very kindly—as, indeed, you always
And here Julia stopped for a moment,
r to find out in what words she
est convey the intelligence that Al-
s in love.

colonel endeavoured to look com-
but in his heart he was firmly per-
that Alfred, in one of his scamper-
d done some particularly unlucky
mischief, and that Julia was sent to
e it. Either one of his best horses
a killed, or half a hundred panes of
e glass broke; but the excellent old
n knew that, let it be what it
he could not really be very angry,
s Alfred who had done it. If, in-
should prove to have been Julia,
e did not think very likely,—but if
ppen to turn out that she had con-
o break one of the great mirrors in
iving-room, or any thing else, possi-
possible, of the same atrocious kind,
that he should be exceedingly angry
for girls never ought to have the
privilege of being naughty as boys.

Nay, he even remembered with satisfaction that, by the whimsical will of her grandmother, which has been already mentioned, she would come into the uncontrolled possession of her little fortune (by his generous care augmented to the respectable sum of ten thousand seven hundred pounds), on the day she was seventeen, of which she now only wanted a few months; and that if she really had broken the great mirror, it would be doing no more than right to make her pay for it. His hitting upon such an expedient to set the imagined mischief right again, was a pretty strong proof that the length of time during which he had been left to twirl his thumbs over the breakfast-table, had put him into as bad a humour as his temperament would permit.

Neither was the imagination of Mrs. Dermont idle during this pause, but it carried her in a very different and much more feminine direction. Her eyes were naturally fixed on the face of Julia, both when she spoke, and when she ceased to speak; and it instantly struck her, that the newly

and beauty of that beaming face, he only too well remembered that had pointed out to her yesterday, turned her adored son's head as to induced him to make the mad proposal trying her, and that she was now at the request of Alfred, to announce it, and to propitiate their consent to each.

Indignation to which this conjecture rose in the mind of Mrs. Dermont, was great indeed; and considering that was of a very good family, had ten thousand pounds, and was, moreover, to her knowledge, one of the very best girls in the world, it was rather greater than was quite reasonable. This, however, was only one proof amidst ten thousand, of the comparative estimation in which she held her son, and her husband's ward. The colour mounted to her cheeks, and her eyes expressed an expression as little accordant to Julia's request, that she "would listen to it," as they well could.

"Listen kindly!" she ejaculated. "That must depend a good deal, Miss Drummond, on the sort of thing you have got to say."

Had Julia been quite as composed as she endeavoured to appear, the strangeness of this unwonted appellation would doubtless have struck her, but as it was, she took no notice of it—most likely, indeed, she did not hear it, for she resumed her speech, thus:

"I told Alfred that I was sure you would, both of you, be as kind as possible,—but I think you will be very much surprised; Alfred wants you to know at once, but without his telling you himself of it at first, that he is very much in love."

The colonel burst into a joyous laugh, and rubbed his hands together with infinite glee, exclaiming, "God bless his dear heart! Is he indeed? So much the better, Julia, so much the better! A young man in his station of life, and with such prospects, nay, with such certainties before him, ought not to enter his twenty-first year without having some such idea as that come into his head. I am glad to hear it, my dear, I am, upon my soul, and so

tell him; and the sooner he comes to me about it himself, the better I am pleased."

"In my word, colonel, I think that depend a good deal upon who it is fancy himself in love with," said Mrs. , "Alfred, manly as he is in looks, and manner, is but a youth, after it is likely enough, I should say, may not quite know his own mind, have taken it into his young head some one to-day, whom he would much ashamed of marrying to-

words brought such an accession of the cheeks of poor Julia, that Mrs. , whose eyes were fixed upon her, felt the least doubt but that she heroine of her own tale, and enough disgusted by the want of which such a proceeding displayed, was provoked at the want of consciousness which such a choice displayed on the part of Alfred, she rose impatiently from her chair, and pushing Julia, who

stood before her, not very civilly aside, walked towards the door.

"Stay, stay, Mrs. Dermont," cried Julia, springing towards her, and seizing her hand, "you have not heard more than half my message yet!—I have not told you who the lady is! Pray, pray, do not go till I have told you that!"

Mrs. Dermont stopped short in her hurried progress towards the door, for a sudden conviction came over her that she had blundered,—that her unequalled Alfred had not been guilty of the prodigious folly of which she had mentally accused him; and finally, that she had used poor dear little Julia very ill. "True, my dear, true;" said the repentant lady, coaxingly putting her arm round Julia's waist, "and it is very wrong to accuse my poor Alfred of folly before I know what he has done to deserve it; but speak out at once, Julia, will you? You cannot wonder at my being rather impatient. Who is the lady?"

"Miss Thorwold," replied Julia, very distinctly.

"Miss Thorwold!" exclaimed the colonel.
"Miss Thorwold?" cried the wife; and
though he spoke in admiration, and she
asked interrogatively, there was nothing in
his accent which sounded at all like dis-
repute.

"The boy shows a good taste, at any rate,"
said the father. "Nobody can deny that.
He is the loveliest creature I ever saw."

"He has made choice not only of the
wisest, but of the most highly con-
sidered and distinguished young lady that he
could have found, if he had searched the
county through," added the mother.

"As far as I am concerned, my dear," said
the colonel, with dignity, "I shall make no
objection. Young men in the position
of Alfred ought to marry early. He is heir to
property that justifies in him, what is
usually considered as imprudent in others.
I want him to come to us, my dear girl;" he
said, tenderly, "and tell him, also, that he
has nothing to fear. I would go to him,
my fellow! only, I think it might have the
effect of breaking in upon his privacy. Tell

him *that*, too, Julia, make him understand my feelings thoroughly."

"And tell him also," said Mrs. Dernont, with equal tenderness, "that he shall find his adoring mother, as he has ever found her, devoted to his happiness, and only wishing to live as long as she can contribute to it!"

Such words as these of course could not be uttered without tears; and the composure with which Julia appeared to listen, formed a strong contrast to the emotion with which the parent spoke.

The only pain, however, which these tenderly approving messages caused to Julia, arose from the delay which the delivery of them must occasion to the gratification of the only wish of which she was now conscious—namely, that of being alone—but she delivered them faithfully, and without retrenching a syllable.

"Thank Heaven, that's over!" exclaimed Alfred, whom she found striding with prodigiously long steps up and down the hall. "And thank you, too, dearest Julia," he

l, pausing in his approach to the break-room, "you have been very kind to

ey parted ; Alfred to receive the ten-
assurances from his parents of their
approbation of his choice, and Julia
longed-for solitude of her own apart-
where her first act was to kneel, and

Heaven for the strength which had
ed her to preserve her terrible secret ;
when she rose again, she felt stronger
and the first bitter agony of young
disappointment over, and the fearful
of disgraceful discovery past, she
e perfectly resigned, tranquil, and self-
sed.

e almost smiled now at the wild folly
a could have made her dream, even
instant, that such a being as Alfred
select *her* for his wife ; and then told
f with the philosophy of patient resig-
a, that different sorts of people had
ent sorts of happiness assigned them,
probably those only were hopelessly
ppy who stubbornly resisted the ar-

rangements of Providence, by setting their wishes upon some impossible fancy, the gratification of which was doubtless made impossible, because, if obtained, it would not prove productive of real happiness to the wisher.

Nor were these mere passing, ineffective thoughts, suggested as a sort of refuge against positive despair; they were, on the contrary, the settled conviction of the young girl's mind, and Julia left her room, after a couple of hours seclusion in it, without feeling any danger of having her youth blasted by unhappy love; on the contrary, she looked forward to an immensity of happiness from watching the happiness of Alfred: her first object through life should be to make herself useful to him, to his beautiful wife, and to their dear children. Oh, how she should love those children!

But the first step towards all this happiness was to be made by her cultivating the acquaintance, and winning the friendship of the beautiful Amelia; and she felt so certain she should succeed in this, by dint of

constant efforts to please her, that had no misgivings on the subject, and felt anxiety about the manner of getting her, and being enough in her to prove her devotion and attach-

, indeed, did seem rather difficult ; Julia had never, as yet, been included of the invitations from the neighbouring families; had never even been taken at the house of Mrs. Knight; nor had any one ever thought of doing her the honour of introducing her to the beauty and *excellence* of the yesterday's fête.

"This cannot last," thought she; "the time must be brought into great intimacy and event; and if nobody else will introduce me, I will introduce myself."

People would easily believe, and Julia still, perhaps, would understand the value of tranquillity to which these hopes, these wishes, and these intentions, had come into the mind of Julia; for few people had been as effectually taught to put themselves and to feel themselves, so much in

the back-ground as Julia. What had happened to her appeared so perfectly natural, excepting indeed the short-lived folly of her hope, that it would have been absurd, beyond excuse or pardon, to sit down and mourn over it as if some terrible misfortune had fallen upon her.

Nothing had fallen upon her that she could dare to call a misfortune—for could the happiness of Alfred be classed as such? No! nothing bad had happened to her—she was exactly in the same situation as she had ever been; and her cogitation ended by her thinking that it was a great blessing public breakfastings did not come every day, bringing silly officers to talk nonsense, and making every body look so gay and happy, that the wearing a pretty flower was enough to make the very plainest people look for a moment as if they were pretty themselves. It certainly was a great blessing that such things did not happen often.

CHAPTER XIV.

interview between Alfred and his
may be easily enough imagined.
were all kindness, and he was all
e. They shed a few tender tears,
ne repaid by a good many happy
and all this occupied about half an
nd then the colonel thought it was
come to business; wherefore, laying
d gently upon the arm of his lady,
s in the act of throwing it for the
ne round the neck of her son, to aid
ression of delight at his coming hap-
ne said, "Come, come, my dear, this
ery natural and very proper, but it

won't go an inch towards winning the fair lady. Alfred, like the perfectly well-conducted young man he has ever shown himself, did not think it right to propose to the object of his affections yesterday, because he was kind enough to wish for our opinions on his choice; but now, that all that part of the business has been settled so very pleasantly, we must begin to think what our next step ought to be. Tell me, my dear boy—and be very sure that your will shall be law—tell me, shall you prefer writing your proposal to the young lady herself; or making it to her by word of mouth? Or would it be any relief to the natural shyness which I believe every young man feels in such a situation,—would it be any relief, Alfred, if I were to write to the young lady's uncle, the Lord Ripley, making the proposal in form, with the offer of proper settlements, and so forth? Or shall your mother, my dear boy, desire our old acquaintance, Mrs. Knight, to break the subject to Miss Thorwald?"

"Neither the one nor the other, sir," re-

Alfred, colouring violently, "I am obliged both to my mother and you in the kind manner in which you have received this avowal of the state of my affection, and I do not scruple to tell you both, that I should have lost my reason or my life perhaps both—had I met with any other. I feel that I must possess America or die. You will not, therefore, suspect me of any uncertainty or vagueness of purpose when I tell you that I consider the interest which I flatter myself I have obtained in her heart, to be sufficient to justify an immediate proposal. I must ask her to visit us, my dear mother; you must let me enjoy again the happiness of her society, and suffer me to use my own time and opportunity for settling her the question upon which my existence depends."

"Assuredly, my dearest Alfred!" exclaimed his father.

"Can you doubt my readiness to invite my dearest?" exclaimed his mother.

"Thank you both!—thank you!" cried

the impetuous young man. "But when shall it be, ma'am? I feel as if the least delay would be the death of me."

"No, no, no, Alfred!" cried both of the terrified parents at once, "there shall be no delay."

"No, not a single hour!" added his mother. "I will write to Mrs. Knight instantly, and ask her to come and dine here any day that you yourself will fix, my dearest Alfred."

"Ask her to dine here, ma'am? Good Heaven! is that all that you mean to do? Do you suppose that I can propose to her as I take off her shawl when she arrives?—or when I put it on at her departure?"

And here Alfred struck his forehead with a considerable degree of violence.

"No, no, Alfred! Your mother does not mean any such nonsense, I am sure. When they come to dinner, they must of course stay the three days that our staying company generally do. Of course, my dear boy, your mother intended nothing else," said the conciliating colonel.

indeed, indeed, sir, she must intend
ing else, or all your purposed kind-
ll be of no avail. I cannot be driven
r, in such a business as this. You
must give me time—and whether I
my feelings to her at the end of three
r thirty, I should wish that Miss
old should be invited to stay here for
h.”

st certainly she shall, Alfred,” replied
ther eagerly, “and for exactly as
months as you like, my dear.”

paused for a minute or two, and then
fixing her eyes upon the colonel’s
d looking a little embarrassed, “only
y know either, how we can find an
just at first, for asking her for so long

It will seem rather odd and fami-
er, my dear, will it not? considering
e never was at our house at all before
ay.”

! mother! mother! is that the way to
a man so distractedly in love as I
eturned Alfred, clasping his hands,
king the very picture of misery—

"odd?—familiar?—Oh! what words are these when my life is at stake!"

"Alas! my dear, dear boy! what can I say?" replied poor Mrs. Dermont, looking inexpressibly distressed. "There is nothing in the whole wide world which I would not do to make you happy; and if I am frightened at the idea of doing any thing strange, and out of the common way, it is only because I dread the idea of her thinking us less acquainted with the manners of people of fashion, than we ought to be. You should remember, my dear, how very highly connected Miss Thorwold is, and that for this reason, if for no other, we ought to be careful that every thing we do, and every step we take, is in proper style. What do you think about it, colonel?"

"Why, I protest, my dear, that I do not at this moment see my way very clearly. We must think about it a little—and, perhaps, our dear Alfred himself may suggest something."

"Yes, sir," said Alfred, rather pettishly, "I will suggest something. I will suggest,

ou please, that you should send for Julia
mmond. She knows, as you are aware,
ne state of my affections, and she is such
quick-witted little creature, that I have
doubt she will invent some scheme or
r that will make the matter easy. Stay
will go and look for her myself."

lfred had no difficulty in finding her,
the meditation we have recorded being
, she had just left her room, and with
bonnet on her head, and a parasol in her
d, she was going out to enjoy a solitary
k in the shrubberies.

"Do not go out just yet, Julia," said Al-
taking the parasol out of her hand in
usual unceremonious manner, "we want
very much in the breakfast-room. My
er and mother are all kindness, but they
puzzling their poor dear heads most la-
tably about matters that I dare say you
find it easy enough to make smooth, if
will but set about it. And don't be
d to *dictate*, as you call it sometimes,
use it is exactly what the dear souls are
ing for."

By the time he had reached this point in his harangue they had reached the breakfast-room door, which he instantly opened with his accustomed impetuosity, and presented Julia to the council, without having given her any intimation whatever of the subject upon which she was to be consulted.

"Dear fellow!" exclaimed Mrs. Dermont, "he has brought poor little Julia to us, in order to help us out of our difficulties! and the poor dear girl looks quite bewildered—naturally enough, to be sure."

The good lady, however, appeared by no means disposed to take offence at her having been thus summoned; but said, in her very pleasantest tone, "Come here, Julia, and sit down by me, and let us hear what sort of invention your young head can hit upon. Of course you have told her, Alfred, where the difficulty lies?"

"No, indeed, mother, I have left that to you, for I don't understand the difficulty, and I should not much wonder if Julia did not, either," said Alfred.

"Oh dear me!" cried Mrs. Dermont, still in the most perfect good humour; "when young men fall in love, they can see nothing—at least they can see but one thing; the present or present, the beloved one is for ever before their eyes, to the exclusion of every thing else. But this is the difficulty, Alfred is very anxious to have Miss Derwold invited to stay here for a good long visit—a month, perhaps, or something of that sort—which is quite a matter of course on his part, certainly, which we can all of us very easily understand. Now the question is, how are we to find any reason for inviting her, which we may assign both to herself and Mrs. Knight, without alluding to the real one? For dear Alfred will not say a word said about that at present—he proposes to take the breaking it to her entirely upon himself, and to select his own way for it. What can we invent now, to say to her, Julia?"

Julia listened to every word of this with the most earnest attention, but without the least trace of agitation or discomposure of

any kind. For the space of about two minutes after Mrs Dermont had ceased speaking she remained silent, and then said, with a smile that was perfectly easy, natural, and *genuine*, "I think, Mrs. Dermont, that there is a way in which you might do it without any awkwardness at all, if it will not be giving you too much trouble."

"Trouble, child ! how can you possibly suppose that I should care for trouble at such a moment as this ? Go on, let us hear what you have got to say, whether there is any sense in it, or not."

"Well, then," returned Julia, smiling again, and looking almost as pretty as she had done the day before ; "my scheme would be this:—If I were Mrs. Dermont I should drive over, to-morrow, perhaps, to Mrs. Knight, and I should say to her, but particularly, of course, to Miss Thorwold also, that the young people all seemed to enjoy the little fête of yesterday,—you must say *little*, I suppose, Mrs. Dermont, though it is not quite true, to be sure,—that they all seemed to enjoy it so much, particularly

the breakfasting, or dining, whichever you choose to call it, in the tent, that the colonel had determined to request the officers to let their marquees remain on the ground while the fine weather lasted; and that you intended to have a few of your young neighbours to pass a little time at the Mount, that they might amuse themselves with bows and arrows, or dancing, or any thing they liked, and that if Miss Thorwold would be one of the party, it would give you great pleasure."

"Capital!" exclaimed Alfred, clapping his hands, and looking at Julia very much as if he longed to give her a kiss for her cleverness.

"Well done, Julia!" exclaimed Mrs. Derwent, laughing. "Has she not hit upon a good scheme, colonel, to get a little more of the same pleasure she seemed to enjoy so heartily yesterday?"

Poor Julia—"her poppy, her mandragora" and cetera. But no such quotation, no such thought occurred to her. She gave one glance, however, at Alfred, involuntarily,

perhaps, but it was natural that she should wish to see if he so interpreted her proposal.

He certainly did not, but, on the contrary, drew near her, seized her hand, and said, with great unction, "I am *very* much obliged to you, Julia. My mother is only jesting. Neither she, nor any body else could really believe for a moment, that you were thinking of yourself. You never do think of yourself."

"As far as I may presume to judge in such matters," said the colonel, "I must say, that I think the plan of Julia admirable. It not only obviates all objections, but it does more—a great deal more. By having a few more young people in the house, the walking about, and the separating into parties, and all that sort of thing, is made infinitely easier—and neither the young lady herself, nor any of her noble friends and relations, can suspect that she is invited here, only for the purpose of giving Alfred an opportunity of seeing more of her before he makes up his mind. There certainly would be something very awkward in that—and,

"I think, I may venture to say, the invitations from the Mount, are not in general managed awkwardly, I should be very sorry if it should happen so now."

"There is not the least danger of it, sir, thanks to Julia," returned Alfred. "But there is one point upon which I must beg you to correct me. Pray do not suppose, of you, that I want any further opportunities of studying Miss Thorwold's character, in order to enable me to make up my mind. My mind is already made up, finally, and for ever! Nothing can ever shake my opinion of her excellence, nothing can ever lessen the passionate love I feel for her! Let this be understood at once—I do not wish to have her invited hither, for the purpose of deciding whether I ought to marry her, but in order to tell her that I must marry her, and die! But I must beg, that I may never hear any observations from any one, respecting her, that shall seem to indicate a doubt of her being the only woman, who ever can make me happy. And now, that I have, once for all, fully explained myself on this

point, let me hear, mother, quite seriously, what you think of Julia's plan? Do you not think that it will remove all difficulties?"

"Yes, indeed, my dearest Alfred, I do," returned Mrs. Dermont, very cordially, "and I really did mean to joke, and nothing more, when I said that she had proposed it for her own sake. She has not been all her life so completely one of the family, dear Alfred, without feeling, as we all do, that nobody's pleasure ought to be brought into competition with yours. And now, being all agreed upon the principal point—I mean, about filling the house with company, and having the tents kept up, and all that, let us consult a little about whom it will be best to ask. And to prove to you, that I do not really think Julia selfish, I shall be very ready to hear her opinion on that point too. I could not help thinking, yesterday, that she was getting to look quite like a grown-up girl, and therefore, you know, we must treat her as one. Come, tell me, Julia, whom shall we ask? Don't let us have any of the town young ladies, if we can help it; they all

seemed to me to be so dreadfully free and easy, yesterday. And to say the truth, considering Miss Thorwold's high connections, I don't think it would do in that point of view. But I declare, I hardly know who we can get, by way of making a very pleasant party. A very small party, I suppose, would not answer the purpose?"

"No, ma'am, it would not, in any way. I would not give a farthing for the whole thing, hardly, if I did not think we should be able to waltz every evening. Julia, you know, can play—she plays waltzes beautifully—and there is something in Amelia's waltzing. But I must not trust myself to think of it."

"Waltzing?—dear me, I declare I never thought of that," said Mrs. Dermont, looking rather flurried. "I am very much afraid, Alfred, that if you make a point of having waltzing every evening, we must ask the town young ladies, for I don't see how we are to get it up without them."

"Oh! yes, Mrs. Dermont, you can," said

Julia, "if Alfred thinks that two or three couple will be enough?"

"Enough? Perfectly enough, ma'am. Let me but have—I mean, that if I have the happiness of dancing with Miss Thorwold, I shall care very little how many couples are dancing after me."

"Then would not Miss Verepoint and Miss Marsh, be young ladies enough for the purpose?" said Julia.

"Perfectly ma'am, perfectly, as far as I am concerned," said Alfred, addressing his mother. "And, besides," he added, "George Marsh is one of the very few young men whom we should like to have staying in the house, and he is a great waltzer. Just fresh from Germany, you know, and as to his sister, we all know that she will go on spinning from night to morning, if you will let her."

"But who shall we have to dance with her, Alfred?" demanded Mrs. Dermont, rather anxiously. "I do not think I should like to have her here for long, if we could not manage to get a partner for her."

"Then you must ask the Stephens's, mo-

ther," said Alfred. "You saw what a waltzer he was, yesterday. Very nearly as good, I thought, as Marsh himself, and fifty times better than any of the officers. Besides, we could not have them staying in the house, you know."

"Certainly, my dear, we could not have a parcel of strange officers staying in the house," observed the colonel, briskly. "We are obliged to do those sort of things in India, but it would not do at the Mount, by any means. I don't see any objection to the Stephens's, if you don't."

"I have no objection in the world, as far as I am concerned," returned Mrs. Dermont; "I am only afraid that they might be rather surprised at such very great civility themselves. Don't you think it will seem odd to them?"

"I heard Mrs. Stephens say yesterday, that they were going to paint their dining-room," observed Julia, "and that she dreaded the smell of the paint. Might you not ask them on that account, without saying any thing about the waltzing?"

"You are my guardian angel, Julia," exclaimed Alfred eagerly. "There, ma'am, now I am sure every possible objection is answered. There can be no reason for asking old Mrs. Verepoint, because Charlotte has been staying here by herself, you know, before now, and that will make one room less; and that room may then be offered to dear Mrs. Knight. I delight in Mrs. Knight! I never saw any creature so devoted to another as she is to Miss Thorwold. It is quite beautiful to see it. Besides, I know she can play waltzes—and then dear Julia can take a dance now and then if she likes it. At any time, if my divine Amelia gets tired, I would take a turn with you myself, Julia—that is, provided I do not happen to have any thing very particular to say to her while she is sitting down."

"Oh! I am never tired of playing, you know. It will be a great pleasure to me. I shall not wish for any thing else," said Julia, earnestly.

"The first thing then, will be to drive to Crosby—to invite THE lady and her friend.

And I do not see why it should not be done to-day, instead of to-morrow," said the colonel, "and if they agree to come, you can call at the Grange as you drive home—that will be setting about the business zealously, will it not, Alfred?"

"Thank you, a thousand thousand times, my dearest father!" exclaimed the young man, his handsome face brightening into an expression of extreme delight; "you are all three the very dearest and best people that ever were born. But it is no good for me to attempt telling any of you how grateful I feel, for unless you were as much in love as I am, it is impossible you could understand me. As to you, Julia," he added, turning gaily towards her; "I hope some day or other you will be in love yourself, and when the time comes, you shall see if I am not grateful! I will move heaven and earth, my dear, to arrange things for you, as nicely as you have now done for me."

CHAPTER XV.

FORTUNATELY, no difficulties of any kind arose to impede the execution of the plan thus fixed upon. Mrs. Knight looked at Miss Thorwold, and Miss Thorwold looked at Mrs. Knight, when the invitation was given ; but this was very natural, and when they both, as with one accord, bowed and smiled, and said that they were sure it would make them very happy, Mrs. Dermont waited for nothing more, but greatly delighted at having thus happily achieved the principal part of her commission, took rather a hurried leave, saying that she had one or two more calls to make, and determined, if possible, not to return home till she had

arranged the whole party in the manner proposed.

Fate appeared to favour the whole arrangement in a very remarkable manner, for every body Mrs. Dermont called upon was at home, and all the persons invited agreed to obey her summons, with every appearance of being highly gratified by it. Charlotte Verepoint coloured a good deal when the individuals intended to compose the party were enumerated, and for about half a moment she fancied that she should make up her mind to decline joining it ; for the person, dress, voice, and manner of Celestina Marsh, as she had seen her the day before, were very disagreeably fresh upon her memory. But before she felt quite ready to speak herself, her mother had spoken for her, saying, in her gentle manner, that she knew no reason whatever why Charlotte should not enjoy the pleasure so kindly offered, at least for a few days. And after this it was quite impossible for Charlotte to invent any objection. So onward went the happy Mrs. Dermont, with as little loss of

time as possible. Beech Hill was her next stage, and here, too, she found the owners at home ; but in the first instance she was a little dismayed by the sight of their long-backed American friend, Mr. Holingsworth, whom, to say truth, the whole of the Mount family had completely forgotten. No sooner, however, had his strikingly transatlantic person met her eye, than she remembered all about him, and all the fine things which Mr. and Mrs. Stephens had whispered about his prodigious intellectual superiorities, on the day when they called to introduce him.

"It won't do," thought Mrs. Dermont; "I must go away without saying any thing about it." But at the very moment that she was meditating how best to account for so oddly-timed a visit, without disclosing the real object of it, a servant entered, and in a subdued, but by no means inaudible voice, demanded of the free-born citizen whether he chose to have his baggage taken to the inn, where the London coach was to stop for him, before he went himself, or whether he would prefer being troubled

with it in the carriage that was to convey him thither to-morrow morning.

The answer proved that his plan of departure was very decidedly fixed ; where-upon Mrs. Dermont skilfully led the conversation to the subject of paint, and its injurious effects on the constitution, adding, in the most amiable and condescending manner, that if Mr. and Mrs. Stephens would favour them with their company for a few days at the Mount, it would give them all great pleasure, and would enable the obnoxious decorators to go on with their operations without any ill effects being produced by it.

Mrs. Stephens coloured with pleasure at this flattering proof of attention from so decidedly the first family in the neighbourhood, and replied, even without the ceremony of first consulting her "*Liebe*," that in her situation it might certainly be of important advantage for her to escape for a day or two, and that she would accept the gratifying invitation with the greatest pleasure.

Mrs. Dermont, nevertheless, remembering the real object of her visit, failed not to turn her eyes upon the waltzing divine; or, as his prejudice-emancipated wife not unfrequently called him, the divine waltzer, and said that they should of course hope to see him likewise.

This appeal enabled Mr. Stephens, greatly, it must be confessed, to his satisfaction, to break off a discussion upon the effect of genu-wine freedom upon the higher class of intellectuals; a phrase which Mr. Hollingsworth took care to render intelligible by passing his hand caressingly over the top of his own head. Starting from the chair in which his high-minded friend had kept him imprisoned by throwing his legs across him, and resting his heels upon a table, and advancing with a rapid step towards Mrs. Dermont, Mr. Stephens assured her that her obliging invitation was, on every account, precisely the most agreeable one he could have received.

"Well now, I am out of luck, I expect, this time," said Mr. Hollingsworth, turning

himself round in his chair, with his legs still extended to their utmost length, as if he had been secured to his seat by means of a pivot; "I suppose they wouldn't give me back my money at the coach-office, would they, if I calculated upon stopping a day or two longer in these parts?"

Mrs. Dermont, was, as we know, rather in a hurry, which she now mentioned, very politely, as an excuse for leaving them abruptly, and moving with rather a more rapid step than usual towards her carriage, set off to Locklow Wood, which, though, rendering her drive altogether rather a long one for her stately coach-horses, she was exceedingly anxious to visit before she returned, that she might be able to surprise her Alfred with the agreeable intelligence that she had already accomplished all that he wished.

As she approached the house, "now all too large for its shrunk" domain, she descried the owner in a very rustic garb, and spade in hand, assiduously removing the weeds from the gravel road which led to it. He took off his hat as she passed him, and hastened

forward to hand her from her carriage, not perhaps without some little feeling of surprise, that the lady of the Mount should, on that day, be making visits instead of receiving them. She soon, however, explained the object of her visit, which he seemed to welcome, as every one else had done, with great satisfaction.

"Is your sister at home, Mr. Marsh?" said she. The answer was in the affirmative.

"Then perhaps, you would have the kindness to inform her of the purpose of my visit, and bring me her answer, without my leaving the carriage, for it is so late, that I shall hardly have time to get home before the dressing bell rings."

"She will, I am sure, come to the carriage to speak to you in a moment," replied Mr. Marsh, as he hastened into the house.

For some time Mrs. Dermont was so pleasantly occupied by recalling the success of all her invitations, and anticipating the pleasure which her Alfred would feel at hearing how charmingly the scheme pros-

pered, that she sat waiting, without feeling any sensation of impatience; but this could not last for ever, and her attention being recalled from her meditations by the restless pawing of her horses, she remembered that she had been sitting there an immense time, and that it was quite impossible she could stay there all day; whereupon she called to the footman, who was amusing himself by watching the gardening skill of a tolerably large party of fowls, who were hunting for what they could find among the flower beds, and desired him to ring the house bell and inquire whether she could have the pleasure of seeing Miss Marsh.

The man obeyed; a maid servant who answered the bell, disappeared with the greatest promptitude as soon as she had received the message, and returned again almost immediately with the assurance that Miss Marsh was making the greatest of haste, and would be there in no time.

Again Mrs. Dermont had recourse to her thoughts; and this time she employed herself not unprofitably, for she began running

over in her mind all she should have to say to her housekeeper on her return; nay, she took time to argue with herself the doubtful question, whether it would be better for her to drive half-a-mile out of her way in her road home, in order to tell the butcher to come up immediately to receive orders for the unexpected demands about to be made upon his stock in trade.

Yet still Miss Marsh appeared not; and again the patience of Mrs. Dermont began to fail, and again she repeated to her footman exactly the same order he had received before, with the additional clause, that if the young lady was still engaged, Mrs. Dermont would beg her to have the kindness to send her answer, as she was unfortunately obliged to return home immediately.

The maid received this second embassy with distended eyes and open mouth, as if only too conscious of its solemn importance, and again she vanished; but not again did she return, for it was the very striking figure of Celestina herself which now appeared, approaching with hurried steps across the wide

old hall, and bending low her head as she approached the open door to save the limp ringlets she had been so carefully arranging, from the too rough visiting of the summer breeze. Having reached the carriage door, however, she was obliged to look up, and, but for the *high spirit* upon which she piqued herself, she might have felt a little disconcerted by the peculiarly grave air with which Mrs. Dermont apologised for having been obliged to hurry her; and then repeated, with very considerable stateliness, the invitation which she said she presumed had been already delivered to her by her brother.

Mrs. Dermont, though rather fine, and a little proud, was by no means an ill-tempered woman, but there was something in the elaborate sweetness of Celestina's appearance, which painfully reminded her of the time she had been kept waiting, and pleasant as was the purport of her speech, the manner of it was not very gracious.

But what cared Celestina for that? Not the thousandth part of a straw. Visions of

dressing, flirting, waltzing, talking, and boasting of it all afterwards, raised her vivacity to a pitch infinitely too high to be reached by the cold demeanour of Mrs. Dermont's manner. Her usually high colour, was considerably higher still ; her black eyes looked all the brighter and all the fiercer for it, and the inconceivably broad grin with which she accepted the blessing offered, caused Mrs. Dermont a momentary pang of regret at Mr. George Tremayne Marsh's having ever been sent to Germany, or having ever returned so accomplished a waltzer.

But there was no help for it now. Miss Celestina, her red cheeks, her fierce eyes, her lank ringlets, her enormous white teeth, and all her trumpery finery, must be one of the peculiarly honoured, and alas ! too intimately-thrown-together little set in the sight of whom her peerless Alfred was to perform the delicate part of a lover !

Poor Mrs. Dermont had heard—though totally guiltless of ever having taken part in an amusement so peculiarly unsuitable to

persons of high distinction—but she had heard that there was such a thing as quizzing; and if this terribly lively-looking young lady took a fancy to amuse herself in this manner during the process of the intended courtship, she felt that it would be too much for her, and that she should probably be driven to very strong measures, such as taking to her bed, or something of that kind, in order to escape from the suffering of witnessing it.

For the first half mile after leaving Lock-low, this excellent lady was in a state of such really low spirits, that any one who had looked at her, must have supposed that she was carrying home tidings of utter failure, instead of perfect success; but then, most fortunately, the remembrance of the important demands upon her hospitable cares which so large a party of “staying company” rendered unavoidable, roused her to a sense of duty, and ere she reached the butcher’s shop, her spirits were relieved, at least for the time, from every anxiety save such as was connected very pleasantly with the monopoly of sweetbreads, sirloins, fillets of

veal, and fore-quarters of lamb. This was a real blessing, and the obsequious butcher having promised not only to do all that mortal man could to assist in fulfilling her liberal designs, but also that he would make many neighbouring mortal men assist him, whenever his own resources should fail; Mrs. Dermont drove up to her own door, a little late, it is true, and a good deal fatigued, but happy beyond measure in the delightful consciousness of having done her duty, and of bringing home to the darling of her heart the news he would best like to hear. She felt, and with reason, that she should be proud to meet both him and her housekeeper. She felt that they must both of them approve and admire her. Nor was she disappointed by the reception she received from either.

“Well, mother?” were the expressive words of Alfred, as he met her in the hall, and seized upon her hand, as if that could answer him more briefly than her lips—
“well, mother?”

“Well, Alfred!” she replied, with a smile

which carried as perfect conviction to his beating heart, as any oath could have done, that the idol of his affections had promised to become a guest in the house of his father.

"Then she will come, mother!" he rejoined, looking earnestly in her face for an instant, and then kissing her.

"Yes, dearest! she will come—and so will all the others, Alfred, who were selected to make up the party."

"All, my dearest mother? How can you have contrived to see them all?"

"There is nothing like an earnest good will, my darling son, to enable one to get through business quickly. I have not only seen all the guests that were to be invited, but another person also, hardly less necessary to our scheme, than the party themselves. I have seen the butcher, Alfred, and taken such measures as will, I hope, insure the garrison from all risk of starvation."

"You are the very best and dearest mother that ever son had!" exclaimed Alfred,

with one of those bursts of affection which he sometimes displayed, and which might have excused, perhaps, if any thing could, the intimate persuasion which existed in the breasts of both his parents, that nothing could spoil him.

"And the day, mother?" said he, with an animation that certainly made him look very handsome.

"The next but one after to-morrow," she replied. "I could not have them before, my dear, because there are so many rooms to be got ready. Six rooms, Alfred, besides the ladies' maids. We shall be quite full, and, indeed, I shall have no room for that Miss Celestina, but one of those we call bachelors' rooms. I hope the Tremayne blood will not be affronted."

"The bachelors' rooms are excellent rooms, mother, fit for any lady in the land," replied her happy son. "But where is *she* to sleep, mother? Oh! how I wish I could sing, that I might give her a serenade under her windows! Tell me, where is she to sleep?"

"In the pink room, Alfred. It is the gayest looking, and I think it is very likely Miss Thorwold will prefer it to the damask room, though that is the handsomest to be sure. But I shall put her friend Mrs. Knight in the damask room, and then they will be close together, you know, only a dressing-room between. You think she would like the pink room best, don't you, Alfred?"

"Oh! yes, mother, It is exactly the one I should have chosen," cried Alfred. "Couleur de rose!—angel!—yes, it is exactly the proper room for her."

This conversation, which, considering that the dinner was waiting, was rather a long one, took place as Mrs. Dermont mounted the stairs to her dressing-room, Alfred following her from step to step; but it would probably have lasted longer still, for the happy young man had seized upon the handle of the lock, and kept the door open, in spite of his mother's gentle efforts to shut it, had he not espied Julia at the end of the passage. He then closed his mother's door

for her, and was by the side of his confidential friend in a moment.

"She is coming, Julia," he exclaimed, "she is coming! Every thing has been done exactly according to your plan. They are all to come. My mother has seen them all. They are all to come the next day but one after to-morrow. Is the pianoforte in good tune, Julia? I hope, my dearest Julia, that you will enjoy it!"

"I am very glad," answered Julia, retreating suddenly to the room she had just quitted, and where, it may be, she had left a glove, or a handkerchief—"and I *am* very glad!" she repeated to herself, when she got there. "This will be the time for me to get acquainted with Miss Thorwold, and to make her love me. I will be so very kind, so very attentive, so very much devoted to her! But perhaps it will not signify. If I were she, I don't suppose I should either see or hear any thing but Alfred."

CHAPTER XVI.

NEVER had any lady more cause to rejoice in a well-ordered household, than had Mrs. Dermont on the present occasion. Considerably before the hour at which the first of the expected guests arrived, not only was the whole mansion, so lately thrown into confusion by the great fête, in the most perfect order, but the very flower-beds looked as if they were dressed for company; not a trace was left upon the well-swept, well-watered, and well-rolled lawn, of the gambols which had been played upon its delicate herbage a few short days before; and, excepting that the tents were still left standing, there was nothing to recall the gay confusion which

had so completely metamorphosed the soft tranquillity of its ordinary aspect. The whole company arrived, with great propriety, so as exactly to give themselves time to dress for dinner, and no more, and therefore, when they assembled in the drawing-room, exactly at seven o'clock, the meeting so closely resembled that of an ordinary dinner-party, that the colonel, thinking it necessary to do or say something to prove that it was no such thing, and that it was intended that they should feel themselves at ease, and without ceremony of any kind, walked to a window, and, having stood there for half a minute, turned round, and, addressing the whole circle in an audible voice, said: "What a beautiful afternoon it is. We must not sit long at table to-day, as if we were a formal dinner-party, but the fair ladies must all wrap themselves in their shawls, and let us enjoy a stroll in the grounds before tea."

His son looked at him for an instant, with a glance that spoke a volume of gratitude and love, and then, addressing the

beautiful Amelia, behind whose chair he was hovering, he said: "My father's proposal is not a bad one, Miss Thorwold. Is it not a misery, in the dog-days, to be kept imprisoned in a dining-room?"

"Oh! horrible!" she replied, throwing up at him one of those glances which very few young men of twenty can stand with perfect steadiness. Alfred ventured to put his hand upon the back of her chair; he ventured also to bend over her, but his heart beat so violently, that for the moment he lost all power of speaking.

She sat, meanwhile, so beautifully still beneath his gaze, that one might have thought, sweet creature, she was turned to stone. But not having, by many degrees, so nearly lost her reason as the young man had done, she felt that the audience was too numerous to justify the continuance of such dumb eloquence any longer, and turning half round, with another glance, powerful enough to have felled a giant, she said: "Don't you delight in the country, Mr. Dermont?"

Alfred, whose two only visits to London had been short and far between, hesitated for an instant, and then replied: "Upon my honour, Miss Thorwold, I can easily believe it possible, that in some situations a man may lose all consciousness of the nature of the place in which he stands—he may take trees for palaces, or a crowded street for a sylvan solitude; a human voice may sound to him sweeter far than the flute of a professor; and he may mistake—oh, how easily! a woman for an angel!"

Of course this was said in a very low whisper; but Miss Thorwold heard it all, and murmured, in return: "What an enthusiast you are!"

This phrase is, as it ought to be, a great favourite with very beautiful young ladies, for it is applicable to a prodigious variety of circumstances and situations; but Alfred had never had it said to him before, and it produced an effect upon him which it is not easy to describe. It was as if she had said to him: "Alfred, I understand you!" Yes, she did understand him, yet she did not

frown. Was he awake? Had he really so spoken already, that she could read his heart? And having read it, did she indeed permit him still to stand close behind her—still to be within reach of the ravishing music of her angelic voice, still within reach of the heaven-fraught flashing of her speaking eye? Oh, why was he not alone with her at that blessed moment? Why could he not prostrate himself at her feet, proclaim his devoted love, and ask her to share with him the prospect of succeeding, in due course of time, to the Mount, and its three thousand five hundred per annum? It was really dreadful to be so very near, both in form and in spirit, and yet to feel that it was absolutely necessary to forbear from expressing the overwhelming rush of tenderness which swelled his heart!

Under these circumstances, it was really a relief when the door was opened and dinner announced.

It must not be supposed, that during these little passages of sentiment between Alfred Dermont and Miss Thorwold, the rest of the

company sat silently looking on, in the disagreeable attitude of observant spectators. On the contrary they were all, more or less, occupied about their own affairs. Mrs. Knight and Mrs. Dermont occupied a sofa together; and the former lady again entertained the latter by a variety of interesting and affectionate observations on the personal merits, and distinguished connections of Miss Thorwold.

If Mrs. Dermont had listened with interest to this theme, on the day of the fête, solely because her son had appeared to regard the young lady with admiration, it will be easily believed that now, considering her, as she did, as neither more nor less, than his future wife, and her own successor in the important situation of mistress of the Mount, every word uttered by Mrs. Knight was received with the most earnest attention, and treasured with observant care.

At the lower part of the ample room, and placed in the recess of a window, stood the colonel and Mr. Stephens; the colonel being occupied, to the very utmost extent of

his meditative faculties, in the inward contemplation of the one great subject, which pervaded every bosom of the true and real domestic circle of the Mount, as the atmospheric air pervades the region in which we live, permitting objects to move about, and have existence within it, but never being really displaced for a moment.

Nothing could be better than the colonel's gentlemanlike air of listening to every thing which his philosophic neighbour uttered ; but had it been examined curiously, it would have turned out to be only the triumph of manner and habit, for he really had not the slightest idea of what Mr. Stephens was talking about. That gentleman, being, in fact, engaged in an endeavour to place in a striking point of view, the advantages likely to arise from bringing people together in the manner in which the present party were now assembled ; observing, that in a country neighbourhood, there certainly was no other way of mutually eliciting talent, bringing forth individuality of character, and in

short, giving an intellectual tone to ex-metropolitan existence.

To all of which Colonel Dermont gave a smiling affirmative, persuaded that his companion was expatiating on the beauty of the highly cultivated home view displayed by the window before which they stood.

Mrs. Stephens was fortunate enough to have got George Marsh in the chair next her, and this sufficed to inspire her with a multitude of high-minded remarks on the universe in general, and the mind of men in particular. For she had heard much of the metaphysical intellectuality of the Germans, and to catch a man who had recently been a member of one of their universities during a long staying visit in the country, was something for which she felt that such a creature as herself ought to be thankful. She cared very little about the accident which had placed Miss Verepoint on the other side of him. "Poor young man! excepting Stephens and herself, she did not believe that there was a single human being in the

whole neighbourhood who knew what mind, contradistinguished from matter, meant."— She knew that in her situation she must not over-fatigue herself, even in talking ; nevertheless, for her own sake, as well as for his, she determined to exert herself sufficiently to prevent their visit from being an intellectual blank to him.

There was no great sympathy as yet, however, between them; for exactly while she was promising him in her heart a great deal of attention, poor George was very seriously meditating upon the most effectual means of preventing her ever talking to him any more. He really was one of the very sweetest-tempered human beings in the world; yet, nevertheless, there was a slight touch of fastidiousness about him—sensitive-ness, perhaps, would be a better word. He could not, let him labour at it as earnestly as he would, obtain that degree of indifference about people whom he felt to be particularly disagreeable to him, which makes so essential a part of the pleasure of society. Where another would turn a deaf ear to

ignorance and affectation, he, poor fellow, turned a tortured one ; and frequent were his struggles with himself, and vain, alas ! as frequent, to keep his nerves tranquil, and his pulse temperate, when circumstances compelled him to listen to any modification of a Stephens, either male or female, when there was no possibility of creeping away, and listening to the chirping of a bird, or the trickling of a rill, instead.

This was an infirmity of which he was deeply conscious, and for which he was very often deeply penitent. When this sort of irritating distaste seized upon him from the persecution of mere dullness, his strenuous efforts to conquer it were often, in some degree, successful ; so far, at least, as all external demonstration went, and he would listen to a long-winded story about nothing, upon something of the same principle as a Hindoo stands upon one leg in the sun. It was a penance, and he knew extremely well that he deserved it for his sinful impatience. But the species of persecution with which Mrs. Stephens now beset him,

was of a different kind; it galled him more, and called for his forbearance less. Instead, therefore, of endeavouring to strengthen himself for endurance, he was steadfastly and sturdily plotting how he might so conduct himself as to prevent her ever attacking him in the same very particularly decided manner again.

It is likely enough that the vicinity of his silent neighbour on the other side, might have stimulated his resolution a good deal, but he was scarcely aware that it did so at all, his resolutely purposed resistance to the infliction being, as he felt, fully justified by the fact that it was not for one day, but for many, that his sufferings would be repeated, if he did not take effectual care to prevent it.

And how did he set about it, poor young man? Certainly not by answering rudely, or by looking cross—it was not in George Marsh's nature to do either—but he set himself, with all the resolution of which he was master, to persuade the lady that he was too completely abstracted in thought to hear her at all. Had he known her better,

he would have been aware that the chances were greatly in favour of her finding in this mental peculiarity an additional stimulant to her efforts towards obtaining a free interchange of opinions and sentiments ; but it was some time before she discovered how exceedingly absent that " very clever young man, Mr. Marsh," was. On the present occasion, when he looked vaguely at her, without uttering a word, instead of answering her question as to how he managed to pursue, in this unlettered neighbourhood, the studies in which he had doubtless " dipped his spirit" while in Germany, she only waited a moment for his answer, and not receiving it, exclaimed, " Ah ! Mr. Marsh, how well I understand you ! But tell me, is not this enforced abstinence exquisitely painful ?" George looked at her with very unmeaning gentleness, but said not a word.

" Oh !" she resumed ; " how eloquent is this mute silence ! What a satire ! Mr. Marsh, you are satirical, I fear me, very satirical !" Mr. Marsh half closed his eyes, and sighed.

"Come, come, my dear sir," added the lady, "you must not get out of spirits about it; we really must not suffer that. Perhaps when you come to cast a more keenly analytical glance over the neighbourhood, than you may, as yet, have had leisure to do, you may find some kindred spirits amongst us, more capable of supplying the place of what you have lost, than you are, as yet, aware." Mr. Marsh turned away his head, and looked out of the window.

"I assure you, my dear sir, that both William and myself are fully capable of sympathising with you in all this; and, trust me, our best plan will be to draw together into a little knot, which, though small, may be both deep and brilliant in its intellectual researches. Some foreign correspondences may help us. We are not by any means poorly furnished in this respect, as we shall have great pleasure in proving to you. William is a corresponding member of more than one philosophical Transatlantic society. You, my dear Mr. Marsh, must have your Tutonic resources in that line, I am very

sure, and thus, though oceans roll between, and mountains rear their rugged heads to keep us asunder in the body, our winged spirits shall cleave the opposing space, and mind encounter mind across the world."

Mrs. Stephens was now so completely off, that she wanted nothing more than the continuance of Mr. Marsh's mortal part in the chair beside her, in order to persuade her that the spiritual and diviner portion of the man was near her likewise, and only rapt into silence by feelings of admiration which would not permit him to interrupt her. Before the dinner was announced, Mrs. Stephens confessed to herself that, next to her dear William, Mr. George Marsh was decidedly the most intellectual man with whom she had ever conversed.

This first attack upon his peace of mind was made under circumstances peculiarly unfavourable to poor George; for, had not Charlotte Verepoint been seated next him on the other side, no way of proving his absence of mind would have been so easy, so natural, and so pleasant, as the rising

quietly from his chair, and removing to another at the greatest possible distance. But as it was, it was as impossible for him to do so, as to have caught her up in his arms, and carried her away with him. No, happen what would, he could not leave a chair that placed him so very near to Charlotte Verepoint, and thus this very important opportunity of proving to Mrs. Stephens that it was not his intention either to talk to or listen to her was lost—a misfortune which brought many inconveniences in its train.

Meanwhile, Celestina, most strikingly attired in a wreath of large natural ivy-leaves about her head, and trimmings of the same round the bottom, sleeves, and bosom of her dress, was looking round her with a very earnest and restless eye, to discover, not exactly who she could devour, but who she could captivate, and the result was certainly not very satisfactory. Happily, however, hope leads us on, nor leaves—some of us at least—till a very late period indeed.

A strong propensity to this perennial trustfulness was one of Celestina's brightest points,

and it now led her to reason pleasantly with herself upon the extreme improbability that Colonel and Mrs. Dermont should think of inviting a large party of staying company to the house, without getting some of the officers to meet them. Perhaps there was some particular mess-dinner to-day, and they would come in the evening? At any rate, she was sure they would several of them dine there on the morrow; and, cheered by this hope, she continued to look about her with a very sprightly air, and as if she did not mind in the least the having nobody to speak to.

Julia, who had been very careful to descend to the drawing-room before any of the visitors had completed the business of dressing—in order to avoid entering a room where she might find several people to be welcomed, and a circle to be walked round—having been, as usual, kindly noticed by Miss Verepoint, found all her efforts so insufficient to conquer the painful fluttering of the heart, that she slipped out of the room again, and ensconced herself just within the

library door, from whence she knew that she could join the party as they passed to the dining-room, without being much troubled by the observation of any one.

And how did the party arrange themselves for this passage?

This is often an important manœuvre, when a set of people are brought together for a "staying visit" in the country; for it not unfrequently happens, that the order in which they move the first day, continues through each subsequent one unchanged.

This, indeed, is almost certain to be the case, if one or two of the couples chance to be particularly well pleased with this first arrangement; for somebody or other will then be sure to observe that they always like to have their own stall—because people get into their places so much quicker when they know where to go. The enjoyment, therefore, of a whole visit, may very greatly depend upon the luck or skill with which this first manœuvre is performed. The lords of the creation have, of course, considerable advantage on this occasion, as on all others

where a partner is to be chosen. The ladies, speaking generally, and setting cases of high etiquette aside, having little or nothing more in their power, than to "look beautiful with all their might."

The lamentable scarcity of gentlemen on the present occasion, left little, however, to be done by either, and that little settled itself, except in one instance, almost by necessity—that is to say, the colonel of course gave his arm to Mrs. Knight, and Mrs. Dermont of course yielded hers to Mr. Stephens. Had it been Mrs. Verepoint instead, the ghosts of all the Tremaynes would, beyond all question, have risen up between her and this new gentleman, had he been ten times married and ordained; but Mrs. Dermont thought less of the past, and more of the present, than the lady of the manor, and therefore, of course, entered the dining-room with Mr. Stephens. That the graceful Alfred should sustain the steps of the beautiful Amelia, did also seem, already, to be pretty nearly a matter of course, and thus the modest owner of Locklow Wood was the only

man left for the possession of whose arm there could be either hope or fear. Mrs. Stephens possessed a quick eye; she saw at a glance how things would go, up to the point, at least, at which the fate of her "young philosopher," as she had just called him in the last of her speeches, was to be decided; but here she felt that there might be a doubt, and a difficulty. Her own claims, as a married woman, she knew to be strong; but she also knew that Miss Verepoint was heiress to the manor of Stoke, as well as to a very influential number of acres attached to it, and she thought it just possible that Mr. Tremayne Marsh might have some long-descended, old-fashioned prejudices of class, which might make him deem it his duty to take charge of the spinster miss instead of the married lady.

"Poor fellow!" thought she, as she paused in her eloquence for a moment, "he is ignorant of English manners! If he makes this blunder to-day, he will not have courage to get right afterwards; and Miss Verepoint is so solemnly silent, that, with the peculiar

delight which he evidently takes in conversation, he will positively get moped to death if he is to sit by her every day. Besides, I detest having nothing but women near me—I must take care to manage better than that.”

In consequence of this sagacious reasoning, Mrs. Stephens held herself upon the alert for the moment when the door should open, and dinner be announced, determined to rise immediately, and, with friendly and unaffected ease, to pass her arm under that of her neighbour.

That she failed in this, was not the consequence of any negligence on her part; but, on the contrary, was solely owing to the too exclusively earnest attention which, at the critical moment, she bestowed on the door; yet she only waited to be sure that it was indeed a servant who opened it, and not Miss Drummond—a *contretemps* which struck her as being by no means improbable. But in that moment George Marsh had made the decisive movement of starting up, and saying, without any apparent symptom of

shyness whatever, "Miss Verepoint, may I have the honour of taking you to dinner?"

The colour of Mrs. Stephens was a good deal heightened when she turned round, and perceived the mischief she feared was already done. Not the least feeling of wounded vanity, however, mixed itself with her vexation, for there was at all times a reserved quietness in the manners of Miss Verepoint and Mr. Marsh towards each other, which had effectually baffled the sagacity, not of Mrs. Stephens only, but of the whole neighbourhood. There was absolutely nobody, not even Miss Verepoint's maid, who had the slightest idea how matters stood between them. No! Mrs. Stephens did not feel that her vanity was wounded, but she was a good deal vexed both on the young man's account and her own, that the conversation between them should so disagreeably be broken off. "She knew so well what it was to be seated at dinner next a being that had no soul!"

Mrs. Dermont would have been greatly shocked on any ordinary occasion, by seeing

a married lady about to pass from the drawing to the dining-room, without having a gentleman to escort her.

Alfred had winced, evidently winced uncomfortably, at the idea which had been suggested by the colonel, of asking one of the officers now and then to make up their number to twelve, and therefore she had negatived it at once, and so absolutely, as to set her son's heart, and her husband's head, quite at rest upon the subject. So now, when she observed the blank sort of look with which Mrs. Stephens threw her eyes around, as if looking for a partner, she said, with as little of form and ceremony as possible in the mistress of the Mount, "Miss Marsh, I think you must give your arm to Mrs. Stephens; it is so difficult to get an equal number of gentlemen and ladies!"

Julia's little plot succeeded perfectly, for she crossed the hall without any body's observing her, and was in the dining-room, and seated at the colonel's left-hand, nobody knew how.

Nothing very particular in the way of

general conversation occurred during the dinner. Mrs. Knight and Colonel Dermont talked just about the average quantity that people do talk when they have got nothing that they would give a straw to say or hear, to, or from, each other.

Mrs. Dermont and Mr. Stephens talked more, because the gentleman had a good deal that he liked to say about what he had done, and was going to do, to his "little place."

"I think I shall make a pretty thing of it before I have done, &c. &c. &c.," he said, and Mrs. Dermont smiled from time to time very obligingly, and replied, "that she did not doubt it."

Mrs. Stephens talked a good deal to Miss Marsh, considering she was but a woman ; for after she had eaten, which she did rather hastily, her soup, fish, and patée (which latter, she stooped forward to tell her husband was particularly well-seasoned), it occurred to her that it might prove an agreeable thing to make an intimacy with

Celestina. It might put that shy young man more at his ease if his sister were in the habit of coming to them often ;—and certainly, in her situation, it might be very useful to have a single young woman, who, towards the last, might be able to come and stay with her a few days at a time. She fortunately thought Miss Marsh very particularly plain, which removed the only objection to this sort of domestic intimacy; and, therefore, before dinner was over, they had got on prodigiously, had recommended several dishes to each other, quite affectionately, and had gone the length of saying on both sides, that they hoped they should become very good neighbours.

What passed between Miss Verepoint and Mr. Marsh, or between Miss Thorwold and Mr. Alfred Dermont, it is impossible to say, for scarcely a word was spoken by either of them above a whisper. Julia did not utter a syllable from the time she entered the room to that of her quitting it. The rest of the company were indeed so com-

pletely divided into tête-à-tête groups, as to render her doing otherwise nearly impossible.

Something had passed, however, between Alfred and Miss Thorwold during dinner, the nature of which might be guessed at by what followed. It must have been something about the sweetness of the summer air on a moonlight evening, for when the young man flew to the door upon his mother's rising, that he might open it for the ladies to pass, he stopped his mother, and begged her earnestly to let them have coffee on the lawn—and not to be *very* long before she sent to let them know that it was ready. Mrs. Dermont looked at him with rapture ; he was flushed, and certainly did look superbly handsome.

"It shall be all right, dearest," she whispered in reply ; "the great marquee, I suppose?"

Alfred nodded his head in approval, and after an earnest glance at the retreating figure of Amelia, suffered his mother to pass, and closed the door after her.

It were long to tell all the varying events, or rather all the varying feelings of that evening. The coffee was taken under the shelter of Major Sommerton's marquee, both by those who enjoyed the *al fresco* style, and those who did not. The moon, too, shone full in upon them before they had done with it ; and then Mrs. Knight confessed that she thought it very cold, and Mrs. Stephens declared that she dared not, just now, venture to run any risks, and Miss Verepoint, taking the arm of Julia, walked quietly, but decidedly, towards the house, and into it, while Mr. Marsh followed at a respectful distance ; and Mr. Stephens, yielded himself unresistingly to the colonel, and listened to all he had to say about two or three of his principal farmers, merely relieving himself a little from time to time, by mentioning a few of the improvements he was going to make at his own "little place."

Alfred saw all this, and trembled, actually trembled in every joint. What ! after managing every thing so beautifully, was he to be cheated out of the anticipated walk in the

shrubberies? He rushed to the side of his mother, and seizing her arm, exclaimed in accents which, perhaps, a mother only could have found intelligible. "You will not go in! You will not destroy all my promised happiness? Take the arm of Miss Marsh, for mercy's sake, mother! For pity's sake, take the arm of Miss Marsh, and ask her to walk with you in the shrubbery!—See! there is not a moment to be lost! They are both going towards the house. This is exactly the only moment that I really cared for!"

Had rheumatism, catarrh, nay, pulmonary inflammation, or even death itself, arisen in tangible form to advise Mrs. Dermont to turn a deaf ear to this petition, she would have paid no attention to this remonstrance—most assuredly, therefore, her particular dislike to "that Miss Celestina" could not avail to prevent her, but stepping forward, on the contrary, with a step most unusually quick and vigorous, she startled that young lady by very abruptly taking hold of her

arm, and exclaiming, "Indeed I cannot let you go in, my dears, till I have shown you how very pretty our oak-tree glade looks by moonlight !"

END OF VOL. I.

Y O U N G L O V E ;

A N O V E L.

BY

MRS. TROLLOPE,

AUTHORESS OF "THE VICAR OF WREXHILL," "THE BARNADYS IN
AMERICA," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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Y O U N G L O V E .

CHAPTER I.

“ I HAVE sent away my maid, Amelia, I suppose you do not want her ? ”

These words, though very softly pronounced, startled the beautiful Amelia Thorwold, as she stood yawning before her mirror, after the first evening of her visit at the Mount had come to a close ; for the speaker had entered in her padded silken slippers, with so soft a tread, that she was quite unaware of her approach.

“ Good heaven, Mrs. Knight, how you

startled me !" she exclaimed. " No, certainly, I do not much want a maid to-night—I am so horridly tired, that if I had fifty maids I would not have my hair brushed now. But what is the matter? Why did you send her to bed?"

" The matter, Amelia, is, that I wish to have a little serious conversation with you before we either of us go to sleep. I am tired, too, I promise you—a fact which you probably will find no great difficulty in believing. But tired or not, I will not submit to another day of Mrs. Dermont's exhilarating conversation without being quite sure that it is likely to answer. We both agreed to come here, I believe, from the same motive, namely, to give this blooming young squire time and opportunity to fall in love with you. At least, I can answer for myself; for there is nothing upon earth that I hate like staying in a dull country house, among a set of people who have not a single idea in common with me. Am I right in supposing it was your motive also? I do beg and entreat that you will tell me the truth."

"Yes," replied Miss Thorwold, yawning violently; "if I know my own heart, as the heroines say, it certainly was my motive."

"Amelia! I will have no jesting, and you must be pleased to forgive me, if I remind you that you are not in a position to permit any sort of levity on such a subject. Is it your intention to marry this young Adonis, if you can?"

"What a mode of putting the question," replied Miss Thorwold, looking into the glass, before which she had now seated herself, while her friend stretched her weary person on a chaise lounge at no great distance from her. "Do you really feel any doubt, Mrs. Knight, as to the family purposes, in giving us this most singular invitation?"

"No, Amelia, not at all; it does not require much acuteness to read the whole story from first to last. This youth, the hope, the only hope, you know, of his snugly well-acred family, has doubtless been the petted idol of both father and mother from the moment that he first drew breath, and this petting, it is not very difficult to see,

has ended by his having his own way in every thing. Your charms, my dear, which I assure you I by no means under-rate, are quite of the kind to inflame the heart of such a youth as this into a whirlwind of love. He has never yet passed a season in town, and is quite unconscious of the fact that there, though not here, there are more Amelias to be had—pardon my inelegant bluntness, my dear—both for love and money. Now, as I guess, this unsophisticated youth, having, on the contrary, made up his mind to believe that no second goddess of equally Venus-like perfection can walk the earth, has informed his papa and mamma that he cannot, by any means, think of living any longer single, and that if they do not immediately give their aid and assistance to his marrying Miss Thorwold, he shall make away with himself. Whereupon, as I guess, the exemplary parents decide upon this invitation project, as the best way of saving the life of their heir, and then the mamma bustles off to settle it. To be sure, the set they have got together does not promise very

much in the way of social enjoyment during your future residence in this pretty village of Stoke ; but I dare say you may be able to find ways and means, my dear, of varying the scene a little. But be this as it may, you must perceive that you have no reason to quarrel with me because I doubt the reality of your conquest ; and you must perceive, also, that I do not bring into the account of probabilities any of your previous disappointments. I know perfectly well that the total difference in the characters and business of the scene may be safely calculated upon as likely to lead to a different catastrophe. No, it is not now to calculate the chances of this young man's being in earnest, or not in earnest, that I now come to invade your needful hours of rest. Such things have been certainly, but the present affair is quite a different sort of thing ; so different indeed, that it is the very certainty of his being in earnest, which causes my anxiety. I am afraid of you, Amelia—I am afraid, dreadfully afraid, that when you get as heartily sick, as I know you will do, of the place and the people, not excepting the

swain himself, who, handsome as he is, can hardly fail, with his total ignorance of every thing one cares for most, soon to become a horrible bore; I am dreadfully afraid, I say, that you will begin to yawn when you ought to sigh, and to sneer when you ought to smile. I have, therefore, thought it my duty for Lord Ripley's sake, Amelia,—who really has enough to plague him, without your adding to it,—to tell you plainly at once, that I must insist upon it you take care what you are about, and that you do not expose me to this detestable bore for nothing."

While Mrs. Knight pronounced this harangue, which, notwithstanding a tolerably rapid utterance, was rather long, the beautiful Amelia began, rather poutingly, to disembarass her slender fingers of their rings, and to remove sundry pins from her graceful bust, to the pin-cushion; but when the voice of her monitress ceased, and that she found that she was expected to reply, an expression of something like sullenness took possession of her charming features, which was speedily

followed by the sneer of which her judicious friend had warned her.

“I really wish, Mrs. Knight, that when you think proper to lecture me, you would do it in your own name, and not in that of my uncle. Nor is it at all necessary that you should so often endeavour to impress upon my mind, that whatever interest you feel for me, is only because I belong to him. Were I you, I really should not be so very anxious to point this out upon all possible occasions. However, I only say this to show that, notwithstanding your having the advantage of half a dozen more years of experience than myself, I am not quite incapable of giving advice in my turn. Do not let us quarrel, however, it would be exceedingly silly for many reasons. You are very lively and agreeable, and your house is a great convenience to me. I am, I presume, rather ornamental, and my presence is occasionally very convenient to you, so pray let us continue the same affectionate friends as usual. As to all you have said, my dear,

concerning Master Alfred Dermont, and his expected thousands per annum, I have nothing whatever to say against it. Yes, he is an only son and heir, which is an immense advantage in such a speculation as the present, and I have no doubt that if I were mistress of this place, I could make it look very decently respectable. Neither will I deny that you have some reason to be afraid of me, seeing that I am a good deal afraid of myself. If it could be done at once, Mrs. Knight, if I could be married to the boy before breakfast to-morrow morning, I think the comfortable certainty that he, and not I, would have to find the cash' necessary for the discharge of the various little bills I have been, as you know, absolutely obliged to run up since my mother died, I think this consideration, dwelt upon resolutely, through all the waking hours of the coming night, would inspire me with strength to marry him in the morning. But whether my poor shattered spirits will bear the wear and tear of his young love, backed by all the delicate

attentions of his father and mother, from noon till dewy eve, through Heaven knows how many days—I cannot tell.”

“TILL dewy eve, my dear,” said Mrs. Knight, laughing. “Pray do not beguile yourself with the belief that you shall escape upon the arrival of dewy eve. For, to say nothing of the animating excitement of a waltz of three couples, and a partner in his teens, by which your nights are to be invaded, it seems likely that you will have to keep company with dewy eve herself in all her dripping freshness. Did you look at that horrible girl who assisted your respected mother-in-law in doing propriety for you this evening? Did you look at her lank black locks when she came in after your moonlight ramble? Fortunately you, and Annette together, have a way of getting up a head, and a face too, for a night’s wear, in a style that may defy any thing short of a shower of rain. But, for the sake of my silk dresses and shoes, I would not yield any more to this nightingale-style of wooing, were I you, Amelia—it is really too dangerous.”

"I am exceedingly grateful for your kind attention to me and my suitor, my dear Mrs. Knight," replied Miss Thorwold; "but, if I am to be wooed at all, I would like quite as well to undergo it in the garden, as in the drawing-room—and as neither dresses, nor shoes are paid for, you know, the cost will fall, as it ought to do, upon the person who is amused, and not on the poor luckless one who causes the amusement. But, jesting apart, Mrs. Knight, the real question is, must I marry this boy at all? Is there no other way to escape? What is the worst that can happen to me if I turn restive, and say I won't?"

"Rather ask yourself, my dear, what is the very best that can happen to you? You know, Amelia, as well as I do, that since you first came out, and made such an immense sensation at Almack's—which it is quite as well to recollect was just eleven years ago last April, you know, I say, perfectly well, that since that time you have been disappointed by at least a dozen men of rank and fortune, who have, one and all,

appeared to be passionately in love with you, but who, one and all, slunk off, without making any direct proposal. You might have had Hilcroft, I believe, if you had not given yourself such very high and mighty airs towards his sister—but it is no use to tell of all this now. Ask yourself, I say, what is the very best you can expect, if you let this chance escape. — In a very few months, Amelia, beautiful as you still are, you will be BETWEEN THIRTY AND FORTY, deeply in debt, without a shilling in the world, and the only near relation you have, so exceedingly out of humour, because you have not justified the brilliant hopes he had formed of your making a good match, that if it were not for my fighting your battles, my dear, I really don't believe he would ever take notice of you again. And, after all, Amelia, what is there in this young man that you can possibly object to seriously? He is decidedly one of the very handsomest lads that ever was seen, and really, as far as I am able to judge, very far from being either awkward, ignorant, or stupid; and I will not scruple

to declare, that your refusing him under all the circumstances, would be an act of such wilful and outrageous folly, that I should not think I was doing my duty, as the friend of Lord Ripley, if I did not tell you beforehand, that I could never take any notice of you afterwards."

We have been told upon high authority, that a deal of scorn may look, or be thought to look, beautiful upon a handsome brow, but I doubt if hatred could ever have the same effect, let the features which expressed it be as lovely as nature could make them. Mrs. Knight had stooped forward to take up a bottle of perfume which stood on the dressing-table, and thus escaped seeing what would have opened to her a new page in the character of her beautiful friend, had it met her eye. In any case, however, it would not have met her eye, for there was at all times so little of natural and involuntary expression in the countenance of Miss Thorwold, that there was no great danger of her ever betraying by that means, any feeling that she would wish to conceal. But a look is soon

looked, and it is probable that the beauty felt some species of relief from thus taking advantage of the absent eye of her "*friend*." When Mrs. Knight had sufficiently bedewed her handkerchief, and resumed her former position, she broke the silence which had followed her last words, by saying: "It is no good to be sulky, Amelia. I must insist upon it that you let me know what your intentions are. You cannot expect that I will continue to stay here day after day, to be bored by a parcel of people who have not, I repeat, a single idea in common with me, unless I am sure that I am doing some good by it. Will you be so obliging as to answer me?"

"Considering your high reputation for sagacious perspicuity of observation, my dear friend," replied Miss Thorwold, "it is rather extraordinary that you should doubt for an instant of my intention of accepting this enamoured swain; UNLESS, Mrs. Knight, I happened still to have some slight ground of hope that I might marry somebody I liked better. Do tell me, will you, how you should like to marry such a pretty Apollo, Belvedere, if

you will, but to *me*, duller than the fat weed that grows on Lethe's banks? How should you like to marry such a juvenile innocent, particularly if he were so much in love with you as not to leave a glimpse of hope that he would ever let you remain in peace, while he amused himself elsewhere? How would you like it, my charming friend?"

"I am half a dozen years older than you are, you know. You keep this in your head so constantly on most occasions, my dear, that it is hardly fair you should forget it on this. But let us leave wit, Amelia, and return to wisdom," continued Mrs. Knight, slightly knitting her handsome brows, "and let me tell you, once for all, that it is too late in the day for you to risk losing a good establishment for any slight hope whatever. On the contrary, it must be a very strong hope indeed, rationally strong, and of a nature to bear the examination of a rational friend as well as your own, which could justify your even pausing an instant upon such a match as this. And I confess, my dear Miss Thorwold, that I am not aware in what direction any such hope

can lie. I will not do you the great injustice to believe for a single instant that any thought of Lord William Hammond can still hold a place in your memory."

"On the contrary, my dear madam, you will be doing me great injustice if you doubt it," returned Miss Thorwold. "Circumstances over which, to use the established phrase, I certainly have no control, render it, I allow, exceedingly desirable that I should marry somebody or other, without further loss of time, as it is quite within the reach of probability that I shall be arrested if I do not. You see, my dear lady, that you cannot put the thing in a plainer light than I put it myself. Nevertheless I, who must know better than any body else can, what has passed between Lord William and myself, I, Mrs. Knight, am decidedly of opinion that there is more than hope, that there is very nearly certainty of his coming forward again; if he could but be well frightened by hearing of this new lover."

"A very desperate game to play, Miss Thorwold, I promise you," replied her admi-

rable Mentor." But let us leave calculations for the present, and devote half a moment to an impartial comparison of the two gentlemen—let me sketch their portraits, Amelia. Here, on this grassy, flower-embroidered *Mount*, stands a young man, as free from every species of vice, I conceive, as the angelic denizens of Heaven. Just look at his fine ample forehead, Amelia,—his clear, brightly beaming eye—no eye can have that sort of light in it without intelligence within. Look, too, at the freshness of that not quite unrazored lip—at the rich brown locks which curl so closely (unscathed by curling irons) round that exquisitely formed head, as to leave its fine classical outline uninjured. Look at the small ear, the well-formed nose, the short lip, the brilliant teeth, the firm broad chin, already proclaiming latent strength of character. Look at the noble stature, not exactly stalwart as yet, but as perfect in its proportions as the god-like statue to which you so jeeringly compare him; and then, fair lady, turn your eyes upon another sketch. Lord William, I confess it,

is of a more suitable age for you, being, as I think, about ten years your senior, which is more as it should be than being ten years your junior. But we must not stop here, but go on, if it so please you, to other particulars. Let me first recommend to your notice the narrow forehead, which though incipient baldness may make it pass for high, is not so (I speak as a phrenologist) in any sense of the word; no, Amelia, it is as poor, low, pitiful, animal a forehead as ever I saw in my life. Then look at the eye, if you will so far oblige me, and tell me what you find there?"

"Love!" exclaimed Amelia, abruptly interrupting her, and with her hands energetically clasped—"love, passionate love!—such as your young Apollo could never express with his, nor ever feel either, were he to live a thousand years!"

"Were I young Alfred's mother, Amelia Thorwold, I would pray the gods that your prophecy might prove true," returned Mrs. Knight, gravely. "But let me go on, if you please. Which of the general contours of the two visages does your fancy prefer?"

The masculine, strongly marked, yet symmetrical oval of the young man, or the long, lanky, exaggerated oval of the older one? Of teeth and hair I say nothing, because it would not be fair, perhaps, to make his lordship's claim to comeliness depend upon what does not, I greatly suspect, belong to him in any sense except a commercial one. His nose certainly is as sublime as a prodigiously strong Roman outline can make it, and the moustache beneath would be faultless, if it were not too black to be altogether free from suspicion. That his person is fine, and that he stands well, I am ready to admit; but place him beside his young rival, and prefer the tapering of his well-made stays, and the military position of his shoulders and chest, to the easy grace of young Dermont, if you can. Such questions, of course, are mere matters of taste, after all."

And here Mrs. Knight ceased, and looked rather triumphantly at her fair companion, expecting her answer.

"You have drawn two portraits, Mrs. Knight, the one quite *con amore*, the other

quite the reverse, and both, in my estimation, more remarkable for their spirit than for their resemblance," said Miss Thorwold. "Permit me also to remark, that, according to my judgment, the wisest sentence in the whole harangue was that in which you state that such questions are merely matters of taste. Now, my taste, my dear friend, leads me to prefer Lord William Hammond, the darling of Almack's, the pride of the park, the glory of the drawing-room, the pet of the boudoir, and the sovereign of the opera, to young Mr. Alfred Dermont, the darling of his mamma, the pride of the Mount, the glory of its drawing-room, the pet of all the young ladies that come into it, and the sovereign of the illustrious village of Stoke. There is a corollary, you know, to your recondite axiom respecting matters of taste; namely, that of, and concerning, matters of taste there is no disputing. Wherefore I opine that we had better not sit talking here all night, in order to decide which of us is right and which wrong. Don't, however, fancy, from any

thing I may have said, that I take your remonstrance ill. On the contrary, I feel the tremendous truth of every word you have uttered upon the absolute necessity of my marrying; and, moreover, I am ready to give you my most solemn promise to be guided solely by your advice, *provided*—bear with me patiently, Mrs. Knight—provided you will give me one more chance with Lord William.”

“*I* give you another chance, Amelia? What on earth have I got to do with it? You do not mean that I am to take you back to London, do you, at this time of the year?” demanded Mrs. Knight.

“Certainly not, my dear friend,” replied Amelia. “Only invite Lord William to Crosby for a day or two. You have only to follow the bright example of these good people, and give a fête, in order to make the inviting him the most natural thing in the world; because, of course, you must invite others too. You know that you told me only yesterday that you must do something, and

yours may be an archery party, if you like it, at which nobody appears to so great advantage as yourself."

"I wonder whether it would be possible to get your uncle out of town for a day or two?" said Mrs. Knight, musingly.

"Most certainly you could, for the sake of an archery meeting, at which you were to be the heroine; we know that of old; and the coming to see me will be such a beautiful excuse to give my aunt, you know. By the way, I saw in the paper, or heard from somebody, somewhere or other, that Lady Ripley was worse than she had ever been; not expected to live, I think they said. How delightful it would be if I were to have you for an aunt, after all!" said Miss Thorwold, affectionately.

"And if I were to consent to this, Amelia, how should you behave to this young Dermont in the interval?" was Mrs. Knight's reply.

"In a manner that I will venture to say should satisfy you," returned Miss Thorwold.

"Well, then," said Mrs. Knight, rising, and kissing her fair forehead, "I will now release you. Good night, my dear, I will meditate a little upon your proposal before I decide. And if I think I can get a sufficient number of people together, it is likely enough that I may accede to it; for, in truth, I hate to vex you, Amelia!"

CHAPTER II.

THE privilege of Asmodeus would often be valuable as a source of comic amusement and hearty laughter; but it would oftener still, perhaps, enable us to witness scenes, passing simultaneously under the same roof, which might give occasion to a good deal of sober thinking on the subject of human blundering and short-sightedness. Moreover it would give us a curious insight into the varieties of human hearts and human actions, and teach us to feel that, despite the apparent similarity of our organisation, the value of a human being as a moral and intelligent agent may vary from a very elevated place in the graduated chain of created beings, to one, in

some respects, a good deal lower than that of a cabbage.

It was in a small, but very neat little apartment, immediately over that in which Mrs. Knight and Miss Thorwold held the consultation related in the last chapter, that Julia Drummond retired to the immense blessing of solitude, after passing a day of such severe moral exertion as made her feel exhausted in body, as well as worn and bruised in spirit. She had blundered too, poor little girl, in fancying that unless she kept a most watchful guard over her looks and actions, she should betray the heavy secret of her heart; whereas, if she had but known how very little any body thought about her and her feelings, she might have suffered her hands to tremble, her colour to change, and her eyes to fill with tears, without giving herself the trouble of trying to get out of sight, or of pretending to have a violent cold in the head, or performing any of the other devices by which she had so painfully laboured to conceal what it had never entered any body's head to find out.

There was no sofa in Julia's room, but there was an easy chair, which had been permitted to take up its quarters there from the time that Mrs. Dermont had got tired of seeing it in her own room, and into this chair Julia threw herself (her door having first been carefully locked), and indulged in a flood of tears, absolutely luxurious from the freedom from all restraint with which she permitted them to flow. But soon this luxury was changed for self-reproach. Was it not already a sin to feel for Alfred what she still did feel for him? She remembered his assiduous attentions, his tender whisperings to the thrice happy object of his choice, and she remembered too,—no, she did not remember, she still saw before her eyes the beautiful, yielding, bashful look with which Miss Thorwold had dropped her eyes upon the carpet as she listened to him. Could they be more completely united if the marriage ceremony had already passed between them? How great, then, was the sin of feeling for Alfred what she still felt for him!

And then Julia rose from her chair, and

knelt before it, and prayed for power to conquer all that was sinful in her attachment to her early friend. And, certainly, her prayers seemed to be attended by a good effect, for she gradually became calm, composed, and peaceful. And then she prayed again for blessings on his head, and on the head of his chosen wife also. And these prayers were repeated again when she laid herself down to sleep; and then Asmodeus, if he had been upon the alert, would have seen a great difference between the expression in her innocent young face and that of the beautiful lady in the pink room on the floor below. And, during the hours which followed, their condition was very different too, for Julia slept sweetly, whereas Miss Thorwold hardly slept at all till the morning, and then the contrasts between them was equally great; for Julia, the heavy languor of the night before no longer predominating over every other feeling, was enjoying the delicious freshness of the morning air in the park, while Amelia lay flushed, and feverish, in her carefully closed apartment, starting in unquiet dreams, which

carried her into scenes as little like the sylvan solitudes which greeted the open eyes of Julia as possible.

In another quarter of the house was Alfred, exulting in the fond belief that his passion was returned by the divine Amelia, and no more conscious of the devoted and unbounded love of Julia, than of the existence of all the vehement passions lurking in the heart of her rival. And there were the well-pleased parents congratulating each other, both pompously and affectionately, on the charming prospect of perfect happiness which had opened before their darling son, by a union with a young lady whose distinguished situation in society, as well as her enchanting personal qualities, rendered her so particularly desirable a daughter-in-law. And Mr. and Mrs. Stephens uttering to each other, till they dropt asleep, the very tenderest expressions possible, while the gentleman was thinking that he wished he had happened to meet Miss Verepoint before his marriage, not only because she was richer, but also because she was a good deal more

agreeable to him than his wife; and the lady was resolving, as it was evident Mr. Marsh was peculiarly shy, that she would give him sufficient encouragement by the condescending kindness of her manners, to enable him thoroughly to enjoy her conversation, which would not only be agreeable during the present visit, but as long as they remained neighbours together in the country, which might, for any thing she knew to the contrary, be all their lives.

As to Miss Celestina, though there might be a little self-delusion perceptible, no other sort of deception could have been discovered by the most comprehensive eye that ever penetrated into the secrets of a lady's bower. For the most unreflecting observer would, at the first glance, have guessed, that whatever portions of her hours of retirement could be spared from sleep, must be employed precisely as they were employed on her retiring to her bed-room on the night in question. Mrs. Dermont, before retiring for the night, had made a civil apology for being obliged to put her into a bachelor's room, and the

young lady, naturally wishing to discover, if possible, who was the bachelor who had occupied it last, spent some few minutes after she had shut herself in, endeavouring to discover, by opening table drawers, glass drawers, and such like repositories, some carelessly left letter or card which might enlighten her. But, this examination finished, she applied herself to what must ever be such a young lady's natural occupation at such an hour. She re-examined and re-arranged various suits, both for morning and evening, carefully twisting and twitching into a state of perfection a variety of artificial flowers, not quite new. She tried on a bewitching little construction composed of net, ribbon, and roses, with which she purposed to cover a small portion of her head on the following morning; and then she sat down, and put each of her beloved lank ringlets into a separate piece of paper, till her head was bristling from side to side with triangular horns, which it might have grieved a pitying heart to know was prepared as a pillow for an enemy. And then she, too, went to bed, and slept as

soundly as her curling-papers, and her hopes and fears for the morrow would let her; all of which was so very natural, that seeing it with the eyes could scarcely be considered as making a discovery. The only two apartments between which there was any real sympathy, were those of George Marsh and Charlotte Verepoint; for he went to sleep thinking of her, and she went to sleep thinking of him.

On the following morning, exactly at ten o'clock, Alfred stood ready at the door of the breakfast-room, with a bouquet of the very choicest flowers from the green-house, and having passed about twenty minutes at that station diversifying the interval by occasional little rambles to the foot of the staircase, he was at length rewarded by placing it in the hand of Miss Thorwold, who received it with a smile which did honour to the fidelity with which it was evident she intended to keep her parting promise to Mrs. Knight.

All the rest of the party were already seated, which made his leading her to one

of two chairs left unoccupied, and the seating himself in another next her, an act of such very particular attention, that most of the company exchanged looks with each other. The delicate bloom upon the cheeks of Miss Thorwold, however, was neither increased nor diminished by the accident; but Alfred became very red, and Julia, though looking the picture of quiet composure, very pale.

There was one other flower, besides the pink roses in Celestina's cap, which might have told tales at that breakfast, if any body had seen the lady for whom it had been gathered, receive it from the gentleman who had gathered it. This flower, though not selected from the reserved treasures of the green-house, was very pretty and very sweet, being a white moss rose bud, and it is possible that George Marsh thought it looked so like Charlotte Verepoint that it ought to belong to her; but why Charlotte Verepoint looked so very much as if she intended to refuse it at first, and blushed so violently

when she did receive it at last, who can tell? There was nobody, however, who could set about guessing, for neither the offering nor the acceptance were seen by any one.

"What lovely flowers!" exclaimed Mrs. Stephens, fixing her eyes on the splendid bouquet which Miss Thorwold had laid beside her plate. The little white rose-bud did not attract her attention; it was, in fact, pretty nearly out of sight, having been hastily, but rather carefully withal, laid exactly where the giver wished to have it, namely, beneath the folding of the robe that was crossed over the little heiress's bosom.

"I have not seen such flowers this year. I do humbly beg and petition that to-morrow morning some gentleman will have pity and compassion on my longing desire for a few flowers. I dare not ask you, Liebe, for I know we are quizzed a little already for some of our conjugalities. I think I must make you, Mr. Marsh, the squire of my nose-gays. Will you accept the office?" added Mrs. Stephens, stooping forward playfully to look

at him, for not only Miss Verepoint, but Celestina was seated between them. And then, indeed, she began to be seriously vexed at his absence of mind; for though it seemed almost impossible that he should not have heard her, he continued breaking the shell of an egg as resolutely as if he had been stone deaf.

Celestina felt ready to laugh, but she thought better of it, and recollecting that the Stephens's had had a gentleman staying with them on the day of the fête, determined to try if she could not manage to run up a friendship with the lady which might lead to her being asked to stay at their house also. With this view she turned towards Mrs. Stephens, and displaying her large teeth from ear to ear, said, with a vast deal of charming vivacity, "It is no good, my dear Mrs. Stephens, to attempt converting my poor brother George into an ordinary mortal. I dare say that at this moment he is in deep meditation upon some German poet or other. I assure you that he is the most tiresome creature in existence.

I wish you would appoint me to be your flower gatherer instead. Do you know there is nothing in the world I delight in so much as devoting myself to young married women. I always think they are so *interesting*, and so very agreeable."

It would have been difficult for any person, who was not a particularly literary or scientific character, to have made a speech to Mrs. Stephens, which would have delighted her so much. *A young married woman!* It was so precisely the light in which she liked to be considered—and there was always something so *interesting* in a young married woman's having a young single friend devotedly attached to her! She immediately, spontaneously, instinctively, made up her mind to receive it as an incontrovertible fact, that Celestina Marsh was a very young girl indeed, and also that it was essential to the happiness of both that they should become intimate, and perfectly confidential friends.

To some young wives, as passionately fond of their husbands as Mrs. Stephens was of

hers, (being moreover of that tenderly affectionate temperament which makes an incessantly demonstrative return of fondness absolutely necessary to peace of mind) the idea of so very intimate a young female friend might suggest the agonising idea of jealousy. And certain it is, that had such a passion found entrance into her heart, the ardent qualities of her head would have caused it to rage with more than ordinary vehemence. But no thought connected with jealousy ever occurred to her, while contemplating their future intimacy.

It is not very easy to explain the precise condition of mind which led, in the case of Mrs. Stephens, to this happy state of confidence, because the only phrase which suggests itself for the purpose is so lamentably matter-of-fact. But it is weakness in an historian to shrink from stating motives which his accurate and acute investigations have made obvious to him, and I will, therefore, in plain language observe, that Mrs. Stephens was not jealous of Mr. Stephens, because her mind was strengthened by the pro-

found conviction that Mr. Stephens **DARED** NOT give her cause.

Such being the state of feeling between the two ladies thus pleasantly seated together at the Dermont breakfast-table, the rapid progress of conversation between them may be easily imagined.

As to the rest of the party, and how they got on together, it may be left to the sagacity of the reader to imagine, but it may not be superfluous to observe, that Mrs. Knight, though apparently listening with very flattering attention to all the colonel's observations on the bread, butter, marmalade, hams, and grills, peculiar to the Mount, ceased not to observe the conduct of her beautiful *protégée*; and, however angry she had been during the conversation of the preceding night, at the difficulties that young lady seemed disposed to discover in the way of the connexion so "providentially" thrown in her path, she could not but acknowledge that she now demonstrated a most laudable adherence to the promise with which they had parted. Mrs. Knight, indeed, was very

wrong, and showed by no means a profound discrimination of character in supposing that Miss Thorwold was, in the least degree, insensible to the advantages of the marriage now likely to be proposed to her ; for Mrs. Knight herself was far from being equally aware of their importance. . It would, indeed, have been difficult for any person less thoroughly acquainted with this beautiful young woman than her own heart, to believe that she was not only quite indifferent to the great personal attractions of the young man beside her, but so greatly disposed to ridicule every word he uttered, and every movement he made, that nothing that the stern resolution which she had formed to marry him, if Lord William Hammond could not be persuaded to marry her, could have enabled her to check her inclination to laugh. As it was, however, nobody, not even the young man himself, nay, not even his adoring parents, could wish for any thing more softly sweet, more bashfully beautiful, more tenderly timid, than the demeanour of Amelia.

“ I am afraid that we must not venture to

think of groves and gardens during the early hours of the day," said Alfred, "there are faces which should not only be guarded from the winds of Heaven, but even from its sunny smiles—we never think that the tint upon a peach can grow too ruddy, but there are cheeks which, in their tender ripeness, have so precisely reached perfection, that the very slightest change might cause every looker-on to put on mourning."

"Are there?" replied Miss Thorwold, turning her head towards him, and, for the fraction of a second, permitting her expressive eyes to rest upon his. "But do you not think," she added, in a low voice, "that there are moods and moments which are apt to make every body forget every thing?"

"Do I?" he returned in the lowest of all audible whispers. "Do I?"—And then it was his turn to look at her—but if he hoped thereby to see her beautiful eyes, he was disappointed, for they were as earnestly fixed upon the nosegay he had given her, and which she had just taken off the table, as if she had been about to draw it.

No words which could by possibility have

been spoken by either, could have equalled in eloquence the silence which followed; but when this had lasted just long enough, Amelia said, with the air of a person endeavouring to rouse himself from a deep and dangerous reverie, "I believe you have some very pretty woodland scenery in this neighbourhood, have you not?"

It was not, of course, till he had relieved his over-charged heart, by a deep sigh, that Alfred could answer at all, but having done so, he replied, "I have thought it so, formerly—yes, certainly, I have always thought our copses and mossy dells supremely beautiful—but I begin to suspect that such an epithet can properly belong but to one object in nature. Such scenery, however, as we have, Miss Thorwold, you might safely, I think, venture to look at, notwithstanding the brightness of the day, if you would not fear to trust yourself to my driving. My mother has the safest little carriage in the world, with a pair of ponies generally driven by a miniature postilion of twelve years old. Do you think you could venture to let me drive you?"

"Why, as far as safety of life and limb is concerned," she replied with an enchanting smile, "I certainly think I could—but—" and there she stopped.

"But what?" cried Alfred, eagerly, and taking the nosegay out of her hand, in order to cut off the thorns from a delicate blush-rose which made part of it; "but what—what else can you fear?"

Again Miss Thorwold's eyes were fixed upon his face, but he felt their flash precisely as a flash of lightning, which, ere one can say 'tis here, is gone. "But what?" he repeated, replacing the nosegay in her hand, and bending himself towards her, over it, as if wishing to mention something remarkable which he had noticed among the flowers. "Tell me!"

"I am quite sure that it is needless," she replied, "I am quite sure that you must know what I mean." And having said this, she raised the nosegay to her face, concealing every part of it save the eyes, which she permitted to wander round the table, and to pause, for half an instant, on Mrs. Stephens and Miss Marsh, who at that moment, were

conversing earnestly, and in whispers, accompanied by that species of laugh which, with unskilful people, is apt to accompany every attempt at quizzing.

"Nonsense !" whispered Alfred, drawing a faded leaf from the nosegay.

"Indisputable," re-whispered Miss Thorwold, shaking her head.

"And will you be so influenced ?" said he, in an accent of reproach.

"Impossible to help it !" she returned, with a gentle sigh.

"Damnation !" muttered Alfred.

"Fye, fye," murmured Amelia.

"But you cannot suppose I can live and endure this ?" said the gentleman, again employing himself in correcting some error in the nosegay, and knitting his brows the while very savagely.

"It is not my fault, you know," returned the lady, in accents of angelic meekness ; "it is very unfair that you should be angry with me."

"Angry ! *Angry* ! ANGRY !" he repeated at intervals, in various accents, but always in

a whisper, and accompanied by the most persevering criticism of the flowers, which the lady as perseveringly continued to hold before her face.

A little more of the same species of conversation occupied the remainder of the time that Mrs. Dermont thought proper to bestow upon the breakfast. There was indeed, something so very interesting in the manner in which her beloved son was employing himself, that nothing but the consciousness that the servants would think it odd if they sat any longer, could have given her courage to interrupt it.

She remembered too that his conversation might be renewed over the books of beauty on the drawing-room table, or over the piano-forte, or over any worsted-work or purse-knitting upon which Miss Thorwold might happen to be employed; and, therefore, having thought about it three times, she got up at last, saying that, "She hoped every body would employ themselves just as they liked till luncheon time, after which the close carriage and the park phaeton, together with

one or two saddle-horses, would come round, in case any of the party should like to explore."

This announcement, which was made in Mrs. Dermont's most demure and lady-like manner, caused the eyes of Mrs. Knight and Miss Thorwold to meet. Had any third party intercepted these glances, they would have made nothing of them, but Miss Thorwold understood perfectly well that Mrs. Knight's eyes said, "You had better think twice, my dear, before you finally reject the mistress-ship of those horses and carriages;" and Mrs. Knight was equally well aware that Miss Thorwold's eyes replied, "I know it as well as you do." And then the party began to separate; Mrs. Stephens put her arm through that of Celestina, and invited her into her bed-room. The colonel proposed to Mr. Stephens a walk round the home pastures, for the purpose of looking at some prodigiously beautiful sheep. Mrs. Dermont herself observed that she always gave an hour or two to her worsted-work in the drawing-room; Miss Verepoint replied

to the observation, by saying that she would fetch her knitting and join her ; and when these two industrious ladies reached that apartment, they found George Marsh there, earnestly engaged in examining the recondite pages of an annual.

"Can you play billiards?" cried Alfred, eagerly addressing Miss Thorwold, as she was preparing to follow the other ladies out of the room.

"Oh no! I don't know the game at all," replied the beauty, with the very sweetest of smiles, and pausing a moment before she made her exit, for the purpose of buttoning her lemon-coloured glove with the greater convenience.

"Let me teach you, then! I will make you a proficient in half a dozen lessons! I will indeed. Oh! do let me teach you!"

It was certainly quite true that Miss Thorwold knew little or nothing about the game of billiards ; but, nevertheless, it was at least equally true that she had been taking lessons from the age of seventeen to the present time, with the most extraordinary

perseverance, whenever she happened to be in a house with a billiard-table, and young men to act as her instructors.

It may indeed be observed, and the observation is of very general application, that young ladies, as beautiful as Miss Thorwold, if they move in that station of life wherein billiard-tables are considered as necessary household furniture, have wonderfully great advantages as to the obtaining lessons in this interesting game; and the study is often attended with great advantage. Sometimes, from natural aptitude, a fair creature will learn to use a mace as deftly as a marker his cue; but much oftener a lucky hazard may be found by seeming chance, than real skill, by which a good deal may be pocketed beside the balls, and a good deal won and lost, beside the bets. As far as this went, Miss Thorwold knew the game exceedingly well, and though, on the whole, she had not as yet won much by it, she always seemed ready to improve herself by new lessons.

There are, however, always a few pre-

liminaries to be settled first, because there are but few young ladies (though now and then an exception may be found) who choose to walk off, in the first instance, tête-à-tête with one of the professors. Accidents, of course, will occur afterwards, when games get particularly interesting, and lookers on get tired, notwithstanding their proverbial advantages in point of understanding what they see, and then the players cannot help themselves, but must submit, like all other mortals, to what is inevitable. But Miss Thorwold had never in her life set off for a billiard-room tête-à-tête with her master, except, perhaps, in the house of her very particular friend, Mrs. Knight, who was the best good creature in the world, and the last person who would suffer any thing to be said that had a single particle of ill-nature in it.

But she was not in Mrs. Knight's house now, a fact which the young master who now offered himself, was not the least likely to make her forget, and she, therefore, very properly shook her head, raising her delicate

eye-brows, however, at the same time, in a manner which nicely expressed the difference between being displeased that such a proposition should be made at all, and being surprised that the proposer did not perceive the impossibility of their going alone.

Alfred, notwithstanding the youthful appearance of his moustache, understood her perfectly, and darting towards a window through which Julia was now looking out upon the lawn, he caught her by the hand, exclaiming, "Julia ! Julia Drummond ! Do make Miss Thorwold go into the billiard-room with us ! Is it not a particularly pleasant morning-room, Julia ? Do tell her, will you, what a delightful amusement it is ?"

The idea of being the third in such a party was certainly not very agreeable to poor Julia, but she was very much in earnest to gain the affection of the beautiful Amelia. She wished for nothing so much as to be her useful and respected friend through life, and how could she find a

better opportunity to begin? Not, however, that she would have refused, had the case been otherwise; but as it was, she gave a nod of willing acquiescence to Alfred, and approaching Miss Thorwold, with a very sweet smile, said, "I hope you will not refuse our petition, Miss Thorwold. Do pray come. I am quite sure it will amuse you."

Among the subjects to which Miss Thorwold had paid particular attention, and which she really did understand exceedingly well, the promise of beauty in a young female face was one. The half-blown beauty of Julia Drummond had struck her on the day of the fête, and then too, she fancied that she had seen symptoms of more admiration and attention on the part of Alfred, than she thought desirable in a young man whom she intended to keep in readiness to marry herself, if circumstances should make it desirable.

Nothing (unless it happened to be ugly) could be less like her own finished and exquisitely decorated loveliness than the little simple figure which now approached.

It is quite true that Julia, though so nearly seventeen, was still too youthful in appearance to be criticised as a beautiful woman; but young ladies of Miss Thorwold's age and pretensions are among the first to overlook such a defect; they may not, indeed, allow that they do so. *Chit, child, brat, and baby-face*, being the appellations most frequently bestowed upon them; but it cannot be said that in their hearts, these full-grown young ladies treat this crudeness of age severely, inasmuch as, for the most part, they would willingly consent, if the choice were offered, to exchange the downward for the upward period of existence.

At any rate, it is certain that when Julia, in her sober-coloured silk morning frock, with no ornament save a neatly stitched cambric collar and cuffs; her black hair smoothly parted, and its curling ends kept in order by her pretty little ears; her miniature feet in the very same habiliments with which they had carried her up hill and down dale, before breakfast; her delicate little hands

without a single ring to set off their beauty, and with nothing better than a tiny black silk mitten by way of a glove. When Julia, under all these manifold disadvantages approached her with her gentle smile and her urgent request that she would go to the billiard-room, Miss Thorwold saw as plainly as the most accomplished artist could have done, that there was in that cream-coloured skin, and those magnificent black eyes, wherewithal to throw into hopeless shade ninety-nine out of every hundred women who approached her.

For some reason or other, it would seem difficult to say what, Miss Thorwold seemed exceedingly disposed to dislike Julia. She did not only look ridiculously young for a girl that was brought into company at all, but she looked so stupidly innocent also, that it was impossible not to see that she would be odious by way of a companion. Nevertheless, Miss Thorwold immediately accepted her invitation, and not only condescended to take her arm without waiting for an invitation, but actually entered into

conversation with her, quite as if they had been equals.

"I should not be the least surprised," thought Miss Thorwold, as they crossed the hall, "if this sensitive miss, who turns from red to white, and from white to red every moment, I should not be at all surprised if she were making ready to fall violently in love with Alfred Dermont herself. The boy is certainly handsome enough to turn such a heart as that, and decidedly much too handsome to be suffered to return any such mawkish passion. At any rate, I will take care that he shall not commit such folly, if only from a generous feeling of compassion;—not to mention that the doing so will enable me to endure the suspense in which I am doomed to live for some time to come, with greater patience, for it will amuse me excessively."

CHAPTER III.

EITHER by some exceedingly good management on the part of Mr. Marsh, or a little imperceptible manœuvring on that of Miss Verepoint, or else from an unusually bright idea being suggested to Mrs. Dermont, by seeing the young gentleman point out something in one of the volumes lying on the table, to the notice of the young lady, from one or other of these causes, Mrs. Dermont was induced to ask Mr. Marsh if he thought he could find something to read to them.

Mr. Marsh threw an inquiring glance towards Charlotte, and perceiving nothing in her looks that he could interpret into an objection to the proposal, he replied that he

thought it not unlikely that he might, for that there was abundant variety before them.

"That will be very pleasant, will it not Miss Verepoint?" said Mrs. Dermont, looking innocently at her blushing face.

"I shall like it very much," replied the young lady. And a book was accordingly found, the reading of which, and the conversation to which it led, occupied the trio till luncheon time.

We need not follow the colonel, and the newly-made country gentleman, Mr. Stephens, in their agrarian ramble, for it is easy to guess the nature of their talk. Not even the remarkable partiality of the Socinian churchman for metaphysical subjects could prevent him from wishing to take his place among the established squirarchy of the county, and he exerted himself to the utmost to be agreeable in that line.

Mrs. Knight had retired, as was her habit, to the soothing solitude of her own apartment. She was a great letter writer, and a great novel reader, and her hours of solitude were about equally divided, let her be where

she would, between these two occupations. On the present occasion she was employed in writing to Lord William Hammond and Lord Ripley.

In the tête-à-tête established in the apartment of Mrs. Stephens there was every appearance of a very close and intimate friendship being the result. It cannot be supposed that the little work upon which Mrs. Stephens so dearly loved to employ herself, had been omitted in her packing up. No, it all lay ready in a little table drawer, which table had already been drawn pleasantly near a window that looked out upon the lawn.

Before she descended to the breakfast-room she had arranged a chair and a foot-stool at this little table to await her return; and as she had carefully placed her little work, and her gold thimble, her mother-of-pearl handled scissors, and her rosewood cotton box upon it, the housemaids had treated it with proper respect, and left it scrupulously untouched till her return.

"You won't mind my going on with my little work, dear, will you?" said Mrs. Ste-

phens, approaching the interesting little repository, and placing herself in the ready chair, carefully arranging the footstool for her own accommodation. "Young as you are, I suppose you will guess what I am about?"

"Oh! I shall be so delighted to watch you!" exclaimed Celestina, curiously eyeing the delicate fabric, as if she had never seen such little work before.

"Dear girl! That is so natural! Bring a chair, Celestina; I really must call you Celestina, it is such an excessively pretty name, bring a chair, my dear, and I will show you all about it."

"Thank you a thousand times, my dear Mrs. Stephens! You are exactly the person I have always wished for as a friend ever since I was grown up! I know I shall love you better than any body I ever saw before."

"Love me! Oh! Celestina. It is almost profanation to use that word when speaking of friendship! If I grow to like you as much as I feel certain I shall do, I shall never let you have any rest till you know what that dear word really means."

"Oh! Mrs. Stephens! What do you mean?" cried Celestina, hiding her face with both hands. "What CAN you mean?"

"Mean, my dear girl? What should I mean, but that I shall not be contented till I see you as happy as myself?"

"You dear, kind creature! What a heart you have!" replied Celestina, greatly touched. "How few people there are who, when they are perfectly happy themselves, care a farthing about the happiness of others! I own, my dear friend, that I do sometimes think—I really at times cannot help thinking that I have a heart capable of appreciating the blessings of domestic life. But this is a subject, you know, upon which it is impossible for any girl to speak to her brother. And my poor heart often feels as if it were bursting. For, excepting Miss Jane Wilkins, who is living now with her grandmother in Wales, I have not a single human being to whom I could dare to express what I feel."

"Poor dear girl! But, never mind, Celestina; we may often contrive to get a little quiet talk together when Stephens is going

over his fields. You do not keep a carriage, I believe, do you?"

"No, we do not," replied Miss Marsh, with a tone and look that expressed considerable indignation ; " my brother is so excessively careful of his money, that he would let me walk, I believe, all the days of my life before he would think of getting a carriage and horses for me. I am sure if you were to see our stables and coach-house, you would perceive that the Tremayne Marshes have not been used to live in the sort of style that he does now."

" Really! Your brother's weakness is love of money then, is it? Every body, they say, has some particular weakness or other belonging to him, and the love of money may not perhaps be the worst ; though to be sure there is nothing very poetical in it. Very stingy is he?"

" I don't mean absolutely to say that he is stingy in every thing," replied Celestina, with a slight heightening of her usual bloom ; " but the fact is that he keeps neither carriage nor horses, and that his ancestors did

keep both. However, I don't wish to prejudice *you* against him, my dearest Mrs. Stephens. He is very bookish, and very clever indeed; and perhaps he is only saving to buy a great library, you know, or something of that sort. But I own I cannot help thinking sometimes that his living so very economically as he does, must be a great disadvantage to me, in the way of marrying you know, for I don't believe there are many men who ever like to venture upon making an offer unless they see some reason to think that the woman will have something."

"Oh no, my dear; you are quite mistaken there; I had thirty thousand pounds, you know, therefore I am a tolerably good judge, and I do assure you, upon my word of honour, that I don't believe my William ever thought of it for a single moment when he proposed to me; nay, I am by no means quite sure that he knew of it. No, Celestina; dear! money *is* of consequence, because it is impossible to live in a good style, and have every thing comfortable about one, without

it; but as to the power by which woman attracts man, and wins him to herself, trust me, money has nothing to do with it!"

"I could listen to you for ever!" exclaimed Celestina, warmly, "I don't think I ever met any one who seemed to possess so much real warmth of heart, and eloquence of language, as you do."

"That is, I believe, what is generally said of me," replied Mrs. Stephens, with unaffected frankness, "but I don't like you the less, dear, for finding it out. And now, my dear Celestina, I want to talk to you a little about your heart; you are quite a young creature as yet, I know, yet still I cannot help thinking, dear, that with your eyes you must have done some little mischief before now."

On hearing these words the eyes of Celestina rolled heavenward, upon which Mrs. Stephens naturally became more sensible of their power than ever, and said: "Come, come, my dear, I must have a full confession, I must indeed, and who knows but I may be useful? 'The course of true love never did'—

I need not finish the quotation—but thus much I will say to encourage your confidence. The warmth of my own feelings leads me to sympathise, more than most young married women with the feelings of others, and there is a rapidity of thought, and an activity of imagination about me, I believe, which can hardly fail, I think, to make me a useful, as well as an indulgent friend to such a truly interesting girl as yourself."

Celestina rose from her chair, threw her arms round Mrs. Stephens, and kissed her.

"It really does seem to me as if my meeting you here were providential!" she exclaimed, with strong demonstrations of sensibility; "I must only take care not to love you too well! Oh! if there were any thing I could do—any work—any satin stitch; my heart longs to prove itself worthy of yours, and if you will but let me come and stay with you for a little while, now and then, I shall be the happiest girl in the world!"

"Never fear about that, my dear," replied Mrs. Stephens, nodding her head, "I am seldom or never deceived in people, and I see

as plainly as possible that we shall suit one another. Luckily too, I really think I shall grow to like that odd brother of yours, with all his faults. I shall tell William to cultivate the acquaintance. A clever man who thinks about books, a little in our own way, you know, is really worth something in such a neighbourhood as this. I don't intend to mind his absence; it rather amuses me than not, and I have no doubt we shall be a great deal together, and do beautifully. I don't think you will ever find my house as dull as this. It is quite clear that they have not the slightest touch of literature among them; it is horribly dull, my dear, isn't it?"

Celestina confessed that without her she should think it rather dull, certainly, and then added, "I wonder if we shall have any of the officers at dinner here to-day; do you think we shall, Mrs. Stephens?"

"Upon my word, my dear, I can't tell; but thus much I will say, that it will be an abominable shame if there are not, with such a girl as you are staying in the house," replied the matron, with great animation. The

conversation did not stop here, but continued without interruption till the great bell of the Mount rang for luncheon, and then Mrs. Stephens exclaimed: "Dear me! how the time does fly with this dear little work, and such a companion as you are, Celestina. However, I shall not be sorry to get some luncheon, for I begin to feel that I have been talking a good deal, and that always makes one hungry. I hope they will let us have that capital veal pie again, it was so particularly well seasoned."

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The series of lessons which were going on in the billiard-room did not last quite so long, though Alfred did all that a man of twenty could do to prolong them; and, for some time, Miss Thorwold condescended to proceed very patiently through all the pretty manœuverings usually performed on such occasions. She held her mace as awkwardly as Alfred himself could have desired, and the necessity of placing it properly within her taper fingers, was so obvious, that she submitted to it again and again. Neither did

she know at all how to stand, or in what angle to hold her beautifully rounded arm; all of which was explained to her by her animated instructor, with a degree of perseverance and zeal that must have been quite edifying to Julia, whose duties as marker were not such as to occupy much of her time; the strokes made, telling more upon poor Alfred's heart than upon the balls.

That Miss Thorwold should get weary of the sport before he did, was natural enough, seeing that she had gone through precisely the same routine many scores of times, while to him it was perfectly new. Indeed, it is highly probable that, notwithstanding all her promises to Mrs. Knight, and her own resolution, which, to do her justice, was by no means wanting in fixedness of purpose, it is very highly probable that, notwithstanding all this, her patience would not have held out quite so long as it did, had not her almost blunted purpose been whetted by a trifling accident which occurred after they had been engaged at the play for about half an hour. Miss Thorwold, either to vary

the sport, or because she was really too weary of it, and was growing spiteful, contrived, somehow or other, so to manage her mace as to bring it with a pretty sharp blow against Alfred's forehead. It had, in truth, hit his eye, and by an action that was probably involuntary, he raised his hand, and held it before the watery eye for a minute or two. Miss Thorwold was beginning to say every thing that was prettiest on the occasion, when her glance chanced to rest upon the face of Julia, which was not only as pale as death, but expressed, in every speaking lineament, a trembling anxiety, which, perhaps, produced the greater effect from the contrast it offered to the feelings of the fair observer.

"So, so, so!" exclaimed the beauty to her own heart, "that is the state of the case, is it? And perhaps, my pretty miss, you fancy that upon the strength of your youth, and your cream-coloured skin, you may run a race with me, and come in winner at last? We will see about that, little bright eyes. At any rate, I may thank you for one thing.

Your modest ambition will keep me awake. There will be considerably more interest now, in rivetting the chains round the heart of our Adonis."

And then the fair creature, in a voice of tender pity exclaimed, "Oh! Mr. Dermont! I am so sorry, so very sorry! For Heaven's sake, let me know that your eye is not hurt! Let me see your eye, Alfred! Mr. Dermont! Let me see your eye!"

Had the young man possessed as many eyes as Argus, he would willingly have lost them one by one, save the last, which must be kept as long as life endured, that he might gaze upon her beauty; but, except that last, he would joyfully have lost them all, one by one, so that at each misfortune he might have heard the same heavenly accents, lamenting it. And when this welcome pain was passed, and over, Amelia kept true to the promise she had thus pledged to herself, and again ran through all the fascinating changes of billiard-table manœuverings with such skill and animation, that a far duller

eye than hers might have perceived that the doomed youth was fifty times more violently in love with her, when at length she stopped, declaring that she really had not strength to play any more, than when they had entered the room.

"What will you do then till luncheon time?" said Alfred, pulling out his watch; "It wants more than an hour to it. Shall we go into the drawing-room, and see what they are about there?"

"A very pretty proposal," replied Amelia, taking hold of a lock of her beautiful hair, which had strayed from under her comb, and pulling it over her shoulder, till the whole of its shining length was displayed to view. "A very pretty proposal, Mr. Alfred, indeed! I should like to know what your good mother would think of me, were I to appear before her in this condition. Instead of going into the drawing-room, I must beg that you will look out to see if the coast is clear for me through the hall. Upon my honour, I will never play with you again, if

you do not take care that I get a free passage to my own room without encountering the eye of any human being."

Alfred looked at her with eyes which said plainly enough, considering his age, that so as he might but see her himself, he would willingly guard her from the approach of every other eye—and then opening the door, and looking out for a moment, he returned to tell her that all was safe, if indeed, she were determined to go.

"If! Are you not the most unreasonable of men?" said she.

"Are you not an angel, and no woman?" he murmured in return, as she passed through the door that he held open for her. She smiled a sort of soft reproachful smile, shook her head, and passed on, with a pretty measured step as long as she knew herself to be within sight of the door, where she felt, with tolerable certainty, that the young man lingered; but having turned out of sight to mount the stairs, she ran up them with a speed of movement by no means very usual to her, and rushing into the room of Mrs.

Knight, threw herself upon the sofa at the foot of the bed, with the air of a person too much overcome by vexation and fatigue to have strength to speak.

"What is the matter, Amelia?" said Mrs. Knight, raising her eyes from her writing-desk, where she had been both reading and writing letters. "You look as if you had not an hour of life left in you."

"Tell me, my dear friend," said Amelia, her eyes closed, and her lips moving, as it seemed, with difficulty to give utterance to her words—"tell me if you think women do ever actually die of fatigue when boys make love to them? Because, my dear, if such a thing can happen, it certainly will happen in my case. You have no idea, Mrs. Knight! I give you my honour, that I have no power of expressing the complete exhaustion of strength and spirits which I feel at this moment."

"At any rate, Amelia, I hope that anticipated disappointment has no share in this depression?" replied her friend. "I tell you fairly, Amelia, that I, who am not in love

with Lord William Hammond, become more and more convinced, as I meditate upon all I have heard and all I have seen of him, that unless you can contrive to persuade him that somebody or other, a cousin in the Highlands, or in the moon, intends to leave you a fortune—unless you can get some such notion as this into his head, he never, never, never will become your husband.”

All traces of languor and fatigue vanished from the features of Miss Thorwold, as she listened to this prediction. Nevertheless she remained silent, till her friend roused her from the reverie into which she appeared to have fallen, by saying: “I presume, by your silence, that you do not agree with me, Miss Thorwold?”

“Why alter the usual interpretation given to silence?” returned Amelia. “But there is one point, at least, my amiable Mrs. Knight, upon which I may have the satisfaction of setting your heart at ease. Nothing can be less like doubt or vacillation than the resolute adoration of Mr. Alfred Dermont. All the satisfaction which this fact can afford

to either of us, we may venture to enjoy freely. And I *have* endured it all, during I know not how many dreadful hours, with the resolution and patience of a martyr! I have endured it, Mrs. Knight, at your request, and, as I hope you remember, upon the faith of a positive promise received from you. I shall consider myself exceedingly ill-used, if, instead of performing this promise, you take to speculating upon the possible result of keeping it."

"It is not a practice with me to break my promises, Miss Thorwold," replied her friend, gravely; "and you must give me leave to say that, considering every thing, it would be much better if you were not quite so much disposed to quarrel with every thing I say and do. My regard for you is very sincere, certainly; but you tax it severely, my dear."

There was a long letter lying open on Mrs. Knight's writing-desk, the characters of which were familiar to the younger lady, and she smiled slightly as she permitted her eyes to rest upon it for a moment. Mrs.

Knight coloured, and folding up the despatch, placed it under the lid of the desk. It is probable that the two ladies understood each other sufficiently well without speaking, for, after a short silence, Mrs. Knight resumed the conversation, much as she might have done if the interval had been employed in the most candid expression of them.

“We are both of us always wrong, Amelia,” she said, “when we suffer the little asperities of temper to which all human beings are liable, to disturb the harmony of our intercourse. Every body agrees that unreserved confidence is the best, and, indeed, the only enduring foundation for real friendship; and it is impossible to deny that there is a good deal of *that* between us. You must perceive that I take little or no pains to conceal my secrets from you, and I have every reason in the world to believe that I am as well acquainted with your heart as you are with mine. Therefore, my dear, we are, and must be friends, unless we are very great fools indeed.”

“True, perfectly and undeniably true,” re-

turned Miss Thorwold; and therefore, without further preface, let me ask if you have written the promised note to Lord William?"

"Had I not so recently deprecated all quarrelling between us, my dear, I should be tempted to scold you for doubting it;" and Mrs. Knight put a note into Amelia's hand as she spoke.

"Yes, my dear friend, you have not only kept your promise, but have kept it well," said she, as she ran her eye over it; "and I am much obliged to you. If this does not bring him to Crosby, I am ready to pledge you my promise that I will hold myself in readiness to marry Alfred Dermont as soon as the settlements can be got ready."

"He has proposed, then?" said Mrs. Knight, eagerly.

"It is my fault and not his, my dear, if the words have not yet been spoken," replied Miss Thorwold, "or rather it was the fault of that little idiot, Miss Drummond, who, by the way, is as violently in love with him as he is with me. But you need not look terrified at that, Mrs. Knight."

"Terrified? No, indeed, I am not terrified. That is using a very strong word, Amelia. But, do you know, I think her excessively pretty. There is something so delicate, so young, so beautifully innocent about her," said Mrs. Knight.

There was some bitterness in the sneer with which the beautiful Amelia listened to this, but she replied gaily, "Well, my dear, with all her 'young charms,' I did not feel afraid of employing her to enact the part of Duenna to me in the billiard-room this morning. Much as Mrs. Dermont appears to approve her son's love-making, and perfectly clear as it is that she has invited me on purpose that I might listen to him, I doubt if she would have thought it quite correct for us to walk off tête-à-tête to the billiard-room. And he thought so too, I presume, for it was he who invited this pale-faced little miss to accompany us. Neither is there any occasion for you to alarm yourself on account of your black-eyed beauty's being in love with the youth herself. The only effect this can possibly have, will be the giving a little piquancy

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to my own affair with him, which I suspect it never would have attained without it. I do not mean that it was any manœuvring of hers which prevented his uttering what it is so evident he is dying to say. It was only her presence."

"Then you must take care, Amelia, to give him a speedy opportunity when this little girl is *not* present. I really cannot endure Mrs. Dermont and Co. many days longer, and whatever may happen between Lord William and you to break it off afterwards, I must tell you fairly that, for your uncle's sake, as well as your own, I do insist upon your not leaving the house till you are engaged to him."

"Very well, ma'am," replied the young lady, carelessly, "I have not the least objection, for I am quite as much determined for myself as you can be for me, that I will not only accept, but actually marry this pretty boy, if I can do no better. But just permit me, will you, to add one single line to your note?" And so saying, Miss Thorwold, who still held the epistle addressed to Lord Wil-

liam Hammond in her hand, approached the table and took possession of a pen.

"Upon my word, Amelia, I think you are exceedingly foolish," said Mrs. Knight. "Depend upon it your volunteering a correspondence with his lordship will not answer. I should think you knew him better than that."

"I know him perfectly well," replied the enamoured fair one, persevering in her determination, "and will take especial care not to wound his sensitive delicacy. You know the proverb. One man may steal a horse, &c. And be quite sure, my dear lady, that one woman may do what she likes, and another may not."

"A very dangerous notion, Miss Thorwold, depend upon it," replied Mrs. Knight, very gravely. "However," she added, "it matters very little. I cannot suppose you mad enough to hesitate about accepting this young man when you have once convinced yourself that you can never be Lady William Hammond. So write what you like, my dear; you have my free permission."

It was with rather a saucy curl of the lip

that the beauty bowed her acceptance of this gracious licence to do, what she would doubtless have done without it; and then, seating herself at the desk, she wrote, in the most delicate characters imaginable, the following pithy postscript:

“P.S. Do come! It will be so pleasant!

“A. T.”

“There, Mrs. Knight! You perceive I have not been very verbose,” said Amelia, rising, and leaving the letter open on the desk. “I give you leave to read my sentimental effusion, if you like it. And now I must repair my toilet for the luncheon-table. No carelessness of mine shall injure the effect of my charms, or endanger, in any way, the security of my brilliant *pis aller*.”

CHAPTER IV.

THERE were several other letters written at the Mount that morning besides this joint epistle from Mrs. Knight and her beautiful friend to Lord William Hammond ; and for the especial gratification of my readers, I will take the liberty of peeping into the letter-bag before it is sent off to the post,—for nothing can assist the development of character so effectually as the perusal of confidential epistles.

“ From Mrs. Knight to the Lord Viscount Ripley.

“ My Dear Friend,

“ It is not often, you know, that I make any attempt to interfere with your per-

tinacious love of London, in season or out of season,—nor with any other predilection which appears to contribute to your happiness. Satisfied that your friendship for me stands firm, whether we are together or asunder, I have schooled myself to the endurance of much longer separations than are agreeable, without ever risking a remonstrance that might annoy you. I think you must be aware that this is my system, and that I have adhered to it steadily; but I must break through it now, and that for very important reasons. On the tenth of next month I mean to rouse my dormant energies for the purpose of giving an entertainment to the whole county at once, which I always find to be a great economy both of money and trouble. The ostensible object of the meeting will be the old fashioned plan of shooting for a silver arrow. One must give some reason or other for bringing people together at two o'clock, and making them sit down to dinner at four, by means of calling it breakfast. I dare say that most of the people will consider it a

great bore, but some will like it ; and what is more to the purpose, it serves the purpose of a ball, and a dozen dinners, all in one. The time has been, my dear lord, when you have yourself declared that you liked to see me in green and silver, with sandals *à la Diane* and so forth ; but I will not be so childish as to fancy any such feelings can exist now. Nevertheless, I do very earnestly beg you to come to Crosby for this fête. Amelia, of course, is here, and I have, *at last*, great hopes that I have been able to secure an excellent marriage for her. The young man is several years (nearly ten, I am afraid) her junior, which I certainly feel to be a very great objection, for twenty years on the other side is, in my opinion, infinitely more suitable in an alliance of this nature. But, under the circumstances, my dear lord, I need hardly point out the propriety of not making any objections on this score—and most happy am I to say that I know of none on any other. Colonel Dermont, of the Mount (one of the handsomest places in this county), is a very

estimable and respectable person in every way, and the young man in question is his only child. The property he will inherit is said to be above five thousand a year; and his devotion to Amelia, who certainly looks handsomer than ever, gives every reason to hope that the settlements will be more in proportion to his fortune than hers. But his father, of course, will have a voice on this point, which brings me to the strongest reason I have to offer for your coming down here. I know, as well as you do, my dear friend, that your doing anything for her in the way of giving money (excepting just for a few smart dresses) is perfectly out of the question,—nor do I believe that she expects it. But this may not be equally clear to Colonel Dermont, and when the offer has been made in form, which we are hourly expecting, he will doubtless think it proper to communicate with you. Now it strikes me, that the only means of avoiding such a direct application as must be replied to by a direct answer, will be your coming amongst us in person.

And then, you know, nothing can be easier than for you to say, not as a matter of business, but as mere affectionate chit-chat, that if Amelia marries well, and to your satisfaction, you shall ever treat her as your own child ; and so I dare say you will—for were she ten times your child, you could not give her what you have not got. Should the colonel desire you to specify *what* you will do for her, I shall recommend you to reply that it is not your intention to do any thing during your life, but that you shall take care to do your duty by her in your will. What renders your making this effort exceedingly desirable, is the disagreeable fact, that Amelia is so deeply in debt as to render it probable she will be arrested, unless the speedy prospect of a good marriage shall set her various creditors at rest, as to their doubts of obtaining payment. The office you have assigned to me, my dearest lord, is no sinecure. As the only child of your only brother, an orphan as lovely in person as she is near to you in blood, could not, as we both well know, be permitted to

fall into such difficulties as must end by her becoming the inmate of a prison, without drawing upon you such a degree of censure as I could not endure to listen to. This, and this only, could induce me to disturb the tranquillity of my existence, by keeping with me one of the most headstrong and violent-tempered young women that ever lived. She torments me even now,—pressed as she is by the constant horror of this threatened arrest,—she torments me even now, with capricious vagaries about the young man, who, by the way, is a perfect Apollo in beauty; but he is too youthful, it seems, for her taste. That, as a matter of taste, she is right, I do not pretend to deny; but I am sorry to say, that Amelia Thorwold is no longer in a position to listen to its suggestions. She has, however, at length, promised to be reasonable, and if you will come among us, my dear friend, at this critical moment, I have no doubt that all will end well. The young lady, I lament to say, does not stand in any great awe of me, and not unfrequently gives me to understand

that she suspects I may have been conscious of some of the weaknesses of humanity as well as herself ; but surely, my friend, the cases are rather different. An attachment, of which none can know the devotion except she who has felt it, *may* have led to the demonstration of some weakness of character under circumstances by which a cruel fate had rendered life too bitter to endure without it. But no one can say that I ever ran in debt. All this, however, is useless. It would certainly be a great consolation and relief to have an hour or two of unreserved conversation with the dearest friend I have ; and, for the present, I keep up my spirits by the hope of obtaining it. Farewell !

“Yours, more than her own,
“CLARA KNIGHT.”

Nor was Miss Thorwold herself without a confidential friend to whom she was in the habit of opening her heart by the most unreserved conversations, when in London, and by equally unreserved letters, when in the country.

This singularly chosen, confidential friend, was a woman who had been originally educated for the place of teacher at a fashionable boarding-school, a situation which she continued to hold for a year or two, but left it to make (as she assured all her favourite pupils) a very advantageous marriage. Perhaps she thought so herself; but, however this may be, it is certain that the exchange she had made did not permanently prove a good one, for a few years later found her in a situation of great destitution and misery.

She had then a child, who, with herself, seemed in considerable danger of starving; but, happily, the child died, and the woman, freed from the incumbrance, continued to struggle with difficulties so successfully, as to obtain the situation of lady's maid in a noble family; there, by some means or other, she contrived to make money; and not liking the restraint which domestic service imposed, she left it, and set up as a buyer and seller of the very highest order of fine clothes.

More business is done in this way among

ladies of fashion, throughout all the capitals of Europe, than ladies of no fashion are generally aware. In the course of this traffic she became known to Miss Thorwold, and the only excuse that can be offered for the ill-assorted intimacy which ensued is, that the original education of Mrs. Stedworth had left its traces both in her language and deportment. Moreover, nature had done much for her. She must have been strikingly handsome in her early youth, and even now, at the age of forty, there was much left of that prepossessing charm which beauty gives. Tall and thin, with fine eyes, and large, but perfectly regular features, there was something of almost Siddonian dignity (quite of the tragic kind too) in her aspect, which redeemed those who admitted her to the honour of familiar conversation from the charge of tolerating vulgarity. Mrs. Stedworth, neither in dress, language, nor person, had any thing vulgar about her; and, moreover, she was a woman of very considerable natural capacity. What blunders she might have made in early life, it is

hardly worth while to inquire; but she was now very far from being in needy circumstances; nor was Miss Thorwold the only lady of fashion with whom she was on terms of such familiar intimacy, as to render he infinitely better acquainted with their characters, their pecuniary affairs, and their adventures, than all their nearest and dearest relations put together. This is enough of preface to make the following letter from the beautiful Amelia intelligible.

“Dear Stedworth.—If I did not know how deeply and devotedly you are attached to me, I should not take the trouble of sitting upright, when I happen to be excessively tired, for the purpose of writing to you. But there is that about you, my poor dear Stedworth, which renders any doubt of your sincerity absolutely impossible. I truly believe that you would no more condescend to say you loved me, if you did not, than an empress would. You are a strange, out of the way creature, my poor Stedworth, and that must be my excuse for my admitting you, as I have done, to my confidence. And

truly, my good woman, there is a comfort, that it is well worth paying a little condescension for, in opening an aching and overfull heart, to any one of whose affection one can be as sure as I am of yours. I have a new trouble now, my dear soul, and Heaven only knows how it will end. Yet it has come in the (generally) agreeable shape of an extremely handsome young lover, with a very handsome estate, and the strongest possible inclination to settle it all upon me, if I will only accept him along with it. But, very unluckily, though he is beyond all comparison the handsomest creature I ever saw, he is, in my estimation, as totally devoid of all attraction as if he were made of wood. And then, as you will know, unless you are goose enough to think I can be cured by nightingales and green fields, my whole heart and soul are devoted to another. Ah! Stedworth! you cannot have forgotten yet what excellent bargains you got of every thing belonging to me that had a shade of blue in it, because it was a colour Lord W. H. detested! And when I tell you that

I seem, in this case, to be doomed to constancy, and to love on, despite time and absence, with all the fidelity of a perfect pigeon, you will readily imagine that the addresses of a blooming youth, rising twenty-one, can have no great charm for me. And now, Stedworth, I have no doubt in the world that, if you were with me, you would lift your great large eyes to Heaven, and exclaim: 'Oh, my dear! remember the debts!' Remember them? Gracious Heaven! as if I were ever able to forget them for a single moment! So far am I from forgetting them on this particular occasion, Stedworth, that I sometimes think I would instantly submit to marry this insipid boy, without giving one sinking struggle more to save myself, were he at this moment in actual possession of his estate. But he is not, and may not be for these twenty years. If I do take him—which I must do, if every other hope fails—it can only be by making him play upon the absurdly exaggerated fondness of his parents, that I shall be able to get these hateful debts paid. True, indeed, I should have the comfort

of seeing him go to prison for them, instead of myself, and there certainly is strong temptation in that—and should this desperate resource prove to be the only one left me, I will endeavour to cheer and strengthen my spirit by remembering it.

“But though my old habit of saying all and every thing to you, my good Stedworth, makes me run on in this way, much as if we had only this little writing-table between us, I have something more business-like to say to you. You will not, I suppose, be greatly surprised to hear that I do not intend to take this young gentleman for better and worse without feeling very perfectly sure that I cannot get out of this hateful scrape in any other way. I need not go over again all the offs and ons of that too enchanting mortal, Lord W. H. You know that I love him passionately, devotedly, desperately, if you will, and that nothing but dire necessity will ever make me abandon the dear lingering hope of being his wife. That he loves me passionately too, you may venture to believe on my assertion, and, moreover, that notwithstand-

ing the *fast living* of which he stands accused, I have no sort of doubt of his being able, when he really wishes it, of obtaining from the enormously rich duke, his brother, sufficient assistance to clear his own debts and mine into the bargain. This done, he must take some diplomatic appointment. I trust it will be at Paris. Where we may live, every body says, in the most perfectly good style upon something incredibly small. And don't you think I shall like this better, goody Stedworth, than becoming Mistress Alfred Dermont, residing at the beautiful retirement of the Mount, with my respected parents-in-law, driving out once a week with four heavy horses, and paying all my nice little bills once a month?

"At any rate I know what *I* think about it, and I will not marry this wearisome boy till I feel perfectly certain that I can hope for nothing better. What I wish you to do for me is this. Go to the divine creature's lodgings in Park-street; you know the number well enough, old friend. Go disguised in any shape or way that you like, but find out be-

fore you answer me whether that Mrs. More is living with him still. Don't suppose, however, that I am such an idiot as to be jealous; I merely want the information as a matter of fact concerning him which will assist to put me *au fait* of his situation. He will be here, Stedworth, within a fortnight. You stare, good woman! But it is quite true I assure you. And then my destiny will be decided. And yet—who knows? The invitation to him only goes by this post. Then how dare I feel thus certain that it will be accepted? If it is *not*, if an opportunity of passing a day or two with me in the country is offered to him, and he refuses it, I hereby solemnly promise to marry Alfred Dermont with as little loss of time as possible.

“And now you know all about me, and my plans, my hopes, and my fears, my doubts, and my dreads. Write to me as soon as you can possibly obtain the information I require, and believe me to be your truly attached friend.

“AMELIA THORWOLD.”

"P.S. Of course you will take care to let my detestable dressmaker hear speedily of this projected marriage with young Dermont. Remember that he is the only son of Colonel Dermont of the Mount; one of the handsomest places in this county. And not only the dressmaker, you know, but everybody else who may take *an interest* in such news."

Miss Celestina, too, wrote a long letter to some "dear Miss Willis," but though exceedingly interesting, and full of a very great variety of tender feelings respecting Mrs. Stephens, Ensign Wheeler, and Captain Waters, I cannot, just at present find a place for it. Neither Mr. Marsh nor Miss Verepoint wrote any letters at all, nor did Mrs. Stephens interrupt her interesting little work for the benefit of her distant friends. But Mr. Stephens not being capable of assisting her in this mutually interesting occupation did wile away a portion of the time between breakfast and luncheon by writing to an intimate friend and near relation, who was a general practitioner in medicine, enjoying considerable

practice in a distant county. Such a correspondent, though he was a man of great philosophical research, may not be considered as likely to receive any information, from his classical cousin, of a nature likely to interest the general reader. But there was one sentence so strongly indicative of the meditations which were going on in his finely organised mind, that it shall be extracted. Speaking of his wife, he says, "I need not reiterate to you, my dear Thomas, the praises of this admirable creature, in which I have already so often indulged when addressing you. But my anxious heart prompts me to ask one question, which I wish, without any effort whatever to spare my feelings, you would answer with professional distinctness. My beloved Arabella, whose immense intellectual superiority has made me, from the very first of our acquaintance, totally indifferent about her age, has never very distinctly told me how old she is. And conscious that, from one so greatly her junior as I unfortunately am, any direct inquiry upon this point might be unpleasant, I have never ad-

dressed any such to her. But I have lately chanced to fall into company with an old gentleman who knew her well in her early youth, and from him I learnt, before he was aware of my being her husband, that she was born in the last year of the last century. Now I wish you to tell me, my dear Thomas, with the most perfect sincerity, whether there is not some danger of life incurred, when a lady, so considerably past forty, increases her family for the first time?"

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CHAPTER V.

THERE had been, at the first commencement of Miss Thorwold's visit, a coldness and reserve in her manner towards Julia, which led that anxious little personage to fear that she must abandon the hope of becoming intimate with her, and heavy was the sorrow which pressed upon her heart as she thought that as soon as the intended marriage had taken place, she should probably be separated from the friend of her childhood for ever. But when the two young ladies met again, which was at the luncheon-table, the demeanour of Miss Thorwold was so greatly changed towards her, that Julia's hopes revived, and again her innocent spirit was

cheered by the thought that she might live to be a faithful, constant, useful friend both to Alfred and to her. Joyfully, therefore, did she receive Amelia's advances, and Alfred had the great satisfaction of seeing them walk out of the room together, arm in arm. In case this new whim, on the part of the beauty, may seem to require explanation, it may be as well to state that it arose from no deeper feeling than a wish to find something of amusement and excitement in probing the little girl's heart, which might assist to keep herself sufficiently awake and on the alert, during the tedious days which must pass before this important, but particularly wearisome, visit was brought to a conclusion.

"You must positively let me make you my friend and companion, Miss Drummond," said she, "while Mrs. Knight and I continue our delightful visit here. The only thing that is wanted to make the Mount the most fascinating place in the world, is the presence of a young friend to enjoy it with me."

Julia's answer was given by her speaking eyes before her lips could utter it, and con-

veyed an eager assurance of most grateful pleasure from the proposal. Amelia looked at her much in the manner of a naturalist who has got a scarce sort of insect for the first time placed in his hands for examination. "What you think that if I let you hang about me, my precocious little lady, it may lead to a comparison of our complexions, or our ages perhaps?" thought she, while a smile played about her handsome mouth. "But I must have strangely forgotten my craft and my calling if that plan succeed."

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The billiards went on in the morning, the rides, drives, and walks after mid-day, and the waltzing every evening, to the full and entire satisfaction of Alfred, although no perfectly favourable opportunity occurred for his proposing the all-important question to the lady of his choice; and this Amelia was determined that he should not do till her final experiment upon the heart of Lord William Hammond had been made.

"I knew what it would come to," said she to Mrs. Knight, who, during one of their

private conferences, was urging her rather to bring the declaration on than to put it off. "I knew his youthful ardour a great deal too well, my dear, to trust to his modesty or discretion after the question has been asked and answered in any way that was not a peremptory and positive dismissal. I will not trust him, I promise you. You will be pleased to remember the terms of our agreement; I am to have one trial more with Lord William, and how is that to be managed if Master Dermont is to come to your fête, considering himself as my affianced husband?"

"Heaven grant, Amelia, that you may not play your game too cunningly, as many and many such a game has been played before," said Mrs. Knight; "and though the hint is not a pleasant one, I think it my duty to remind you that it is rather too late in the day for you to run any risk. I confess I have very little hope that you will ever encounter such another opportunity again."

"You are excessively obliging, my dear madam," returned Miss Thorwold, affectionately, "but it is surprising to me, consider-

ing your own experience of the long-protracted power of beauty, that you should already feel so much anxiety on my account. Do endeavour to tranquillise your spirits, Mrs. Knight ; I will take very good care not to lose my conquest, I promise you."

And assuredly Mrs. Knight was wrong if she fancied that Alfred had any chance of breaking his chain. Miss Thorwold, notwithstanding her repeated failures among the more experienced and thoroughly enlightened portion of mankind ran very little risk of wearing out the first love of so vehement an adorer as Alfred, as long as no other men were present who might tempt her looks and smiles to wander away from him. In truth she managed the matter admirably ; for although Alfred had never yet proposed to her, and that for no other reason than because she had never afforded him an opportunity of doing so, it had never once occurred to him that there was any premeditation in this. Moreover, he was so perfectly happy in the enjoyment of her radiant presence, and so enraptured by the multitude of little co-

quettish *agaceries* with which she permitted herself to indulge him, that he really was never sufficiently cool-headed to reflect how often he had approached her with the full determination of laying his heart at her feet, and how constantly he had been prevented from doing so by some little manœuvre of hers.

In short, he loved on in a state of unspeakable enjoyment of the present, without feeling any anxiety whatever for the future.

All beautiful young ladies of Miss Thorwold's age, feeling as strongly as she did the necessity of marrying somebody or other, would do well to throw out all their fascinations for the junior class of marriageable young men ; for it requires as limited a knowledge of ladies' hearts as that of poor Alfred, to see and understand the difference between those which receive a love as freely displayed as his, with the intention of accepting and returning it, and those who permit it to flutter round them either for the mere pleasure of watching it, or the more dangerous purpose of turning it to account if necessary.

An older man than Alfred would have known perfectly well, that, when upon the nearest possible approach to a declaration, Amelia invariably performed some lively piece of playfulness, or suddenly recollected that Mrs. Knight was waiting for her, it was because she neither chose to give him up nor to accept him.

But no such thought ever occurred to him. The *angel*, as he called her fifty times a day, sometimes within reach of her own ear, oftener within reach of Julia's, and oftener still to his own heart, the *angel*, if his attentions were irksome to her, might have dismissed him by a single frown. But the frown came not, and Alfred continued, without a shadow of misgiving, to luxuriate in the paradise which his fancy had created.

But Julia was not quite so well satisfied. She had persuaded herself into the firm conviction that the only happiness which was now left within her reach in this life was the witnessing Alfred's happiness in a union with Miss Thorwold, and she felt a feverish longing for the information that their marriage

was finally settled and arranged. Alfred, who, when the beauty escaped to the solitude of her own room, or the tête-à-tête companionship of Mrs. Knight, used invariably to seek Julia that he might talk to her about the divinity of his beloved, constantly replied to her anxious inquiries on the subject, that he had the supreme happiness of knowing perfectly well that he was beloved, but that as yet his sweet Amelia had shrunk from any positive avowal of his passion.

Not for the universe would Julia have hinted to him her thoughts on the subject; but, notwithstanding the condescending attention with which Miss Thorwold continued from time to time to honour her, often endeavouring to make her talk of herself and her notions of love, notwithstanding her endeavouring to persuade herself that this was very amiable, and showed a most flattering wish to be intimate with her, she could not like or approve Miss Thorwold's manner to Alfred.

With a species of tact which, in a woman, requires no experience to help it, she per-

ceived that every look she looked, every smile she smiled, every word she spoke, and every little sigh she breathed, was *done on purpose*. She saw, too, not only that the purpose was successful, but that Alfred was for ever lost in fond admiration of Amelia's beautiful *naïveté* precisely when her own heart sunk within from discovering her systematic affectation.

Upon one occasion when something of this kind had occurred, as they were all three sitting at a little table, pretending to be intent upon finding out words from letters selected for each other, from a box of alphabets, the eyes of Julia fixed themselves involuntarily on Miss Thorwold, who was going through a regular manual of coquettish tricks, for the (to her) evident purpose of persuading him that she was fluttered and agitated by his earnest manner of looking at her, whereas Julia was perfectly persuaded, from various little observations almost too minute to record, that the whole scene was on the lady's part neither more nor less than a piece of accomplished acting. Amelia caught her eye

before it was withdrawn, and felt the grave rebuke of its fixed glance. She coloured violently, and instantly rising, said: "I fear, Mr. Dermont, that Miss Drummond thinks we are amusing ourselves in a very childish manner. No doubt she is right. But it is very difficult to be always wise, is it not?"

What Julia had done to produce this evidently painful impression on his divine Amelia, he knew not, but most vehemently angry did he feel with her; and, without thinking it necessary to inquire into particulars, he determined that, for the future, he would endeavour to prevent her remaining near them as much as she had hitherto done.

To say the truth, he was conscious that Amelia *had* betrayed a good deal of emotion, and the idea that any feeling of prudery on the part of Julia should check what was so very delightful to him, was considerably more than his habits of never being contradicted in any thing, could enable him to bear patiently.

He also rose, and darting a fierce look of

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displeasure at the conscious girl, who was well aware that Miss Thorwold had read a part, at least, of what was passing in her mind, said, in a tone which did very tolerable justice to his feelings:

“If our amusements are not sufficiently sublime to suit the taste of Miss Drummond, I really should recommend her leaving us to ourselves, and seeking what may be more congenial to her taste elsewhere.”

In order to understand the sharpness of the pang which this speech inflicted on Julia, it will be necessary to remember all she *must* have suffered before she brought herself to undergo the penance which had, by degrees, been thrown upon her by the evident wish of the lovers, of remaining with them, that she might shield them by her presence, from the disagreeable observations which were likely to have followed the too frequent recurrence of positive tête-à-têtes!

“Pray do not go, Miss Thorwold,” added Alfred, eagerly reseating himself at the table, from which she seemed about to rise. “Surely Miss Drummond’s taste need not be impera-

tive upon us. I have got a word here that I so very much wish to give you !”

Miss Thorwold looked at the varying colour of poor Julia, and, confirmed in her conviction that she loved Alfred, enjoyed with no trifling pleasure, the painful expression of her features. She was herself most heartily tired of having every imaginable word expressive of love or beauty, or having any connexion with matrimony, set before her, in order that she might “*find it out* ;” but she could by no means give Julia the triumph of believing that her impertinent looks had broken up the party.

She had before hated her with a strange bitterness, considering the total absence of every thing like offence on the part of the innocent girl, but now the feeling against her was no longer mere dislike—it was resentment, and she only waited for her leaving the room, before, pushing the toys which had occupied them gravely aside, she said :

“ It is very painful to me, Mr. Dermont, to perceive the very strong and, I must say, unmerited dislike, which your father’s ward

has evidently conceived against me. I am greatly afraid that the only right thing for me to do is, to leave the Mount and return to Crosby, whether Mrs. Knight should think fit to shorten her visit or not. You must surely be aware, Alfred, though you cannot possibly understand all I feel, that it must be terribly painful to me to see myself the object of dislike and reprehension."

"Dislike and reprehension!" exclaimed Alfred, trembling both with rage and love. "Miss Thorwold!—Amelia!—admirable, lovely, adored Amelia!—let me, oh! let me!"

"Ah, Alfred! you are thoughtless in wishing to detain me thus!" replied Amelia, startled by the evidently near danger of hearing the decisive question which she was so determined not to hear just at present, and snatching her hand with an appearance of nervous terror from the passionate grasp of her young lover, she added, "you are thoughtless, Mr. Dermont, I will not say you are unkind, for, trust me, my heart acquits you of every feeling that is not good,

noble, and generous towards me." And here, having reached the door, the graceful creature drew forth her embroidered handkerchief, and applied it for an instant to her eyes. "Farewell, Alfred! Farewell, my dear friend," she added, with a little sob. "Fear not but we shall meet again. But if you—if you really have a regard for me, you will prefer seeing me where there shall be no danger of my receiving such looks as have been directed to me to-day."

"I will not detain you, Miss Thorwold!" cried Alfred, in a perfect agony of emotion. "On my life, on my honour, I will not ask you to listen to a single word, a single thought of all that my heart swells to say to you. It shall not be here, Amelia; it shall not be in my father's house that I will venture to tell you." Miss Thorwold extended her hand towards the lock of the door. "Nay, Amelia! Trust me! Let me conjure you to trust me one moment longer. What I feel at the conduct of the treacherous young creature whom I so truly believed to be my devoted friend, and as

much my sister in affection, as if the parents of one of us had been the parents of the other also, I will not attempt to tell you," said Alfred, his lips trembling with emotion, "I cannot express it to you—I have no power, no words!" Large tears were in his eyes, and he turned abruptly from her to conceal feelings of which he fancied himself ashamed.

But Miss Thorwold saw it all, and her firm set teeth were rather strongly ground together within her ruby lips. "And the silly boy fancies that he hates her, I dare say," was the thought that made her turn her beautiful eyes upon him with a more unequivocal expression of tenderness than she had ever ventured upon before.

"Oh!—I can guess it all," she said, in a most pathetic tone. "But, indeed, indeed, you must not dwell upon it. Yet I feel some consolation, as I witness these painful feelings, in thinking that your eyes must be opened now to the character of this dangerous young person. Let not your generous unsuspecting heart ever be deceived by her again! Oh! I *could* tell you such

traits of her unmerited hatred towards me! Yet I think you have seen enough to form a tolerably correct judgment for yourself. But I must leave you, Mr. Dermont. Indeed I must! Be very sure that Miss Drummond is watching the door of this room with the eyes of an Argus, and counting every moment that I am so imprudent as to remain alone with you."

"You shall go, Miss Thorwold, you shall go instantly," replied Alfred, making a vehement effort not to fall at her feet, and proclaim his passionate love; "only promise that you will not execute your barbarous threat of going away, and I will wait your own time, lovely tyrant as you are, for telling you." The danger now seemed too pressing to be braved any longer, and Miss Thorwold very prudently seized the handle of the door, turned it, and made her escape; not, however, without casting such a look behind her, as she knew he would remember, to the safe exclusion of every other thought, till they met again.

"There! I have managed our release,

Mrs. Knight, from this wearisome bondage!" exclaimed the yawning beauty, suddenly entering the apartment of her friend.

"Our release!" returned Mrs. Knight, looking both angry and terrified. "You have not surely, Amelia, you have not been mad enough to quarrel with the boy? If you have, I give you my honour, that when we leave the house, you shall go one way, and I another. I positively declare, that I will trouble myself with you and your folly no longer."

Miss Thorwold threw herself into a chair, laughed, and yawned, and laughed again. "How little, how very little, do you know of me and my character, my dear friend," said the young lady, rather scornfully. "Do you know, that, clever as you are, I think I understand you a great deal better than you do me? I should never, for an instant, suspect *you* of sacrificing a great pecuniary advantage, for instance, the chance of catching a tolerably rich viscount, or any thing of that substantially advantageous kind, for the pleasure of indulging either a fit of spleen, or

a fit of dullness. But oh! it is dull, dear friend! And very lengthy, is it not?"

"Then I am to presume that you have not quarrelled with him, I suppose?"

"Yes, my dear lady, you may suppose it, and without any presumption at all. Mr. Alfred Dermont has just been favouring me with such violent demonstrations of love, that, upon my word, instead of scolding, you ought to pet me a little."

"And I will pet you, Amelia, if he has proposed and you have accepted him. Is that what you mean, dearest, by saying you have managed our release?"

"No, dearest, not quite," replied the beauty, with another laugh. "I am by no means the capricious unmeaning person you seem to take me for, my much-esteemed friend. I told you not very long ago, that I did not intend to let this sweet youth come to a formal proposal of marriage till I had given myself one more opportunity of ascertaining whether the love of a man I like better will, or will not, bring him to the same extremity. And now, my dear Mrs. Knight, I tell you

so again. Be so good as to believe me this time, will you? And we shall both be spared any further trouble on that point."

"If you would be so obliging as not to talk to me in riddles, Miss Thorwold, I should have a better chance of fully appreciating the sublimity of your character, and the pertinacity of your will. What did you mean me to understand, when you said that you had managed our release?"

"I meant you to understand that I had devised and executed a project which would enable us to exchange the preternatural dullness of the Mount, for the elegant repose of Crosby; and, although I expected that, with grateful admiration, you would ask me *how*, I did not anticipate that I should get as my reward, such an amount of scolding and threats, as might make me doubt whether I should, indeed, so very greatly improve my condition by giving up the Mount for Crosby."

"You are very ungrateful, Amelia, to resent a warmth of feeling on my part which so strongly proves my affection for you. I would to

Heaven, my dear, that you could teach yourself to appreciate only with common sense and fairness, the innumerable advantages of the Mount, and then you would soon cease to have any idle longings to be elsewhere."

"Example, my dear Mrs. Knight, is worth all the precepts in the world. Let me see you submit gaily, quite gaily it must be, remember, only for ten more days, to the inspiring convivialities of this delicious mansion, and I pledge you my word, that you shall never hear me call it dull again."

"Nonsense, Amelia!" returned her friend, yawning in her turn. "Nothing can be so perfectly unfair as to make my feelings here, a measure for what yours ought to be. You have got to animate and amuse you, one of the handsomest young men that nature ever formed, distractedly in love with you—and I have got—his mamma—for shame, Amelia!"

"Upon my honour, Mrs. Knight, I would very nearly as soon have the mother as the son. If you happened to think my respectable uncle, or any other man of the world,—I don't wish to be personal,—if you happened,

I say, to think any body as fascinating and altogether irresistible as I think Lord William Hammond, you would not perceive more beauty in Master Alfred than I do. But to return to the theme which your suspicions so cruelly interrupted. I tell you that I have hit upon a most excellent expedient for withdrawing ourselves from the overpowering delights of this Elysium. I have fastened a quarrel upon that queer little animal, Miss Julia Drummond, and have told Alfred, in a very sentimental style too, that we must meet elsewhere ! And have left him in a paroxysm of mingled emotions, compounded of adoration for me, and indignation against her."

"How can you be so needlessly spiteful, Miss Thorwold?" said Mrs. Knight, angrily. "If your marriage with the young man depended upon your setting them together by the ears, I could excuse it ; but as this is not the case, I really think your invention is a most detestable one. Pretty, gentle little creature ! I really cannot conceive how you

could find it in your heart to injure such a sweet-looking young thing as that."

"How do you know, Mrs. Knight, but it may be the sweet looks of the young thing which set me upon it? How do you know but that I may be jealous of her?"

"I wish you were, my dear, with all my heart and soul, and then, perhaps, I might forgive you, even if you laid a plot to poison her. But I know you better, Miss Thorwold. You are not at all likely to espy in such a simple, unpretending little creature as Julia Drummond, any thing, either in body or mind, that could suggest the idea of jealousy to you."

"I am not quite so sure of that. Do you know that I could count up a score of the handsomest women in London that I would rather trust Lord William with, than this one little trumpery girl?"

"Indeed?" replied Mrs. Knight, raising her eye-brows. "Then you are less dazzled by the splendour of your own charms than I imagined, my dear. But all jesting apart,

I really cannot see why you should find it necessary to quarrel with any body in order to enable us to get away. If you really are resolute in your determination of keeping the proposal at arm's length till you have again seen Lord William, or till he has refused our invitation, which, I presume, you would consider as an answer in full,—if you are quite resolute on this point, I see no reason why we may not—why *I* may not inform my amusing friend, Mrs. Dermont, this very evening, while you are enjoying the intoxicating exhilaration of your nightly waltz, that I have friends coming to me from town, and must be at home to receive them.”

“And what will you do in case Mrs. Dermont, in one of her paroxysms of fond indulgence to her son, should beg you to leave me behind?” said Amelia.

“I would be very generous, Miss Thorwold,” replied her friend. “I would tell her that I cannot, as yet, make up my mind to live without you. And then, by way of preparing a little balm for her to pour upon

the bleeding heart of her son, when this dreadful news shall be made known to him, I will tell her of my projected fête, and pretend to consult her as to what day will suit her and her family best."

"And you have told Lord William that it is to be on Thursday week!" exclaimed Miss Thorwold, with a look of dismay.

"How can you be so childish, Amelia?" returned Mrs. Knight, laughing. "Do you really think that there is any danger lest I should change my day at the suggestion of Mrs. Dermont?"

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The measure thus determined upon between the two ladies, was brought forward with great ability at the time proposed, and received by Mrs. Dermont with the anticipated degree of surprise and regret. But Mrs. Knight did the business so skilfully, that she perfectly succeeded in setting the fond mother's mind at rest respecting the ultimate success of her son with the fair lady of his love; for, having made up her mind completely on the subject of Lord

William Hammond, and not believing that the beautiful Amelia had the slightest chance of so increasing the impression she had appeared to make on the heart of his inconstant lordship as to obtain from him any thing approaching an offer of marriage, Mrs. Knight scrupled not to hint, very intelligibly, that she could not avoid seeing the mutual attachment of her admirable young friend and Mr. Alfred; adding, with every appearance of deep feeling, "I cannot, my dear Mrs. Dermont, give a higher proof of the admiration I feel for your son, than by saying that, notwithstanding all the immense offers which my lovely Amelia has refused, I should see her give her hand and heart to him, with the most entire satisfaction."

This, together with such a mention of the intended fête at Crosby, as she had promised Miss Thorwold to make, perfectly answered the double purpose intended,—that is to say, their departure was announced and decided upon, yet the tender hopes of the enamoured Alfred were in no degree shaken thereby.

CHAPTER VI.

CONSIDERING the great satisfaction felt by the party assembled at the Mount, at the flattering invitation which brought them there, they bore the breaking-up of the party, which seemed to be proclaimed the next morning at breakfast, by the announcement of Mrs. Knight's departure, and that of her young friend, better than might have been expected. Two only out of the set being altogether free from a sort of secret movement of satisfaction upon learning that they were not expected to eat any more solemn breakfasts, dinners, and suppers there at present. Miss Verepoint and George Marsh were the only individuals who felt

the discovery to be disagreeable, for they only had that within them which could render all external circumstances pretty nearly indifferent. As well may a stone, dropped from the summit of a projecting rock be arrested by a wish from falling into the sea at its foot, as such an attachment as theirs be stifled, and put an end to, by the wishes or the efforts of those who feel it.

Both these young people felt, and felt strongly, that there were various objections to their union, much too serious to be got over pleasantly. To George, the idea of a man out of suits with fortune, endeavouring to win the affections of a wealthy heiress, had something so revolting and detestable in it, that, although he went on from day to day engaged in doing this and nothing else, he had never yet found courage to call this occupation by its proper name, and would have been quite as much shocked had some cruel looker-on told him he had been making love, as if they had informed him that he had inadvertently set fire to his neighbour's house.

And as for Charlotte, although she would by no means have judged such an attack upon her affections with equal severity, she was quite as far as he was from deeming their union a happiness within the reach of hope. Could she propose Miss Celestina Marsh to her beloved, her exemplary, her delicate-minded mother, as a most near connexion, and, unless she withdrew herself from that dear, precious mother, as an inmate and every-day companion? Could she do this? No! Not even to become the wife of George Marsh.

But, notwithstanding these most genuine feelings on both sides, they had been happy, oh! very happy, during the ten days they had now passed together, and the pang which accompanied the ~~information that this happiness~~ was about to end, shot through both hearts at once, producing very perfect sympathy.

But as to all the rest of the party, there truly was not one among them who felt any regret. Mr. Stephens, and Mrs. Stephens, and Miss Celestina Marsh, all felt very strongly

the great advantage of having such a long intimate sort of visit at THE MOUNT to talk about. But they all felt also, that it was a dreadfully heavy business to live from morning to night under the influence of Mrs. Dermont's incessant civilities, and never-for-an-instant forgotten duties, as mistress of the house. It was not, certainly, that either of the three were troubled with that delicate sort of sensitiveness which renders every degree of mental annoyance intolerable. But there *is* something in the species of persecution with which such very dull ladies as Mrs. Dermont beset their guests, that must, sooner or later, wear out the spirits of almost every variety of human beings.

And as if this were not enough, the colonel, though considerably less dull by nature, very effectually filled up the measure of weariness by incessantly pointing out to every guest in succession, and then to them all collectively, and then to all in succession again, that his house and his horses, his grass and his sheep, his dogs and his guns, his gardens and his stables, his wines and his ales, his aspect and

his air, the water that flowed through his ground, and the trees which grew upon it, were all better, very remarkably and particularly better, than those possessed by any other living gentleman whatever.

Such ladies and gentlemen, therefore, as Colonel and Mrs. Dermont do well to adhere to the rest day, dressed day, and pressed day system, for as each brings with it some little variety of its own, the heavy pressure of Dermontian monotony is not so severely felt. But ten days' continuance of the strictly regulated hospitalities of **THE MOUNT** would tame the spirits of a harlequin.

Neither was this all which had occurred during the visit to make the termination of it welcome. Celestina had very reasonably hoped for officers, but had found none. Mrs. Stephens had laboured to establish a metaphysical friendship with a young gentleman, and had been obliged at last to content herself with a greatly less sublime intimacy with his sister, and Mr. Stephens had made the disagreeable discovery that all ladies of fortune were neither so old, so ugly, nor so pre-

ternaturally cleverer than every body else, as his own "sweet love."

All this tended to facilitate greatly the business of breaking up, the idea of which had hung rather heavily on the mind of Mrs. Dermont during the night which had followed Mrs. Knight's announcement of her intended departure, and the breakfast of the following morning. She had, indeed, been wise enough to avoid repeating within the reach of any mortal ear that awful word "month," which Alfred, in the fervour of his young love, had mentioned as the period to which he flattered himself the visit would extend; yet still she feared that a party established in so very agreeable a mansion, without having heard any time specified for the termination of their stay, might be hard to move, and it was a great relief to her to perceive how very well the majority of the company bore it. For the feelings of Miss Verepoint and poor George were not worn on their sleeves, and though Miss Thorwold knew her duty better than to look otherwise than very sweetly sad, the

obvious reason for this was not of a nature to render it disagreeable.

But even if every thing else had moved on slowly, and with difficulty, the charming spirits of Mrs. Knight would have set it all right again, for the relief which this sudden movement gave her was great indeed. Mrs. Knight was by no means a particularly intellectual person; but, nevertheless, she had a good deal of cleverness about her, and a quick eye for the ridiculous, especially when there was any one near for whose amusement she thought it worth her while to purvey. Moreover she had been much accustomed to that best *vie de château*, in which people being permitted to take their own way in amusing themselves often find it in the occupation of amusing others. But at the Mount, as Mrs. Dermont considered it her duty to amuse every body, nobody was ever amused at all, unless indeed they took the matter so decisively into their own hands as to run away from her.

Alfred bore the departure of his beloved

better than his anxious mother expected; but the idea that Julia, the playmate of his childhood, the friend of his youth, the confident of his first, and as he hoped and believed, of his only passion, that she should prove so corrupted in heart, and so diabolical in temper as to dislike and offend Amelia, had something in it so hostile to every feeling of enjoyment, that he became, as he reflected on it, completely reconciled to the change, and fully convinced that the being permitted to visit her at Crosby would afford him much more unmixed enjoyment than continuing to see her in the presence of Julia at home.

As to poor Julia herself, the only advantage she anticipated from the change was, the being permitted to pass more hours alone. The character and order of intellect of Miss Thorwold had been developed very clearly to her during much less than half the time they had passed under the same roof, as far at least as her conduct and feelings during that interval of time were concerned. And gladly would Julia have given her life could she have changed the false-hearted, artful

coquette into a being worthy of becoming the wife of Alfred Dermont.

"Oh, if she did but love him as I love him!" thought the every way miserable girl, "how much better I could bear the frivolity, the inanity of her mind! But she loves him not; it is all false, false, false. Poor dear Alfred! He thinks that I am vexed and angry, because he expressed displeasure at my having *insulted* her, as she called it! Loyal-hearted and true himself, he dreams not that it is possible she should deceive him. Angry, Alfred, angry with you? Would to Heaven that I did not love you all the better for it. But how can I watch the pure sincerity of every feeling in him, contrasted with the deep falsehood of every affected feeling in her, and *not* love him the better for it?"

And then, naturally enough, she failed not to torture herself by reflecting how utterly impossible it was for her to interfere, in order to open his eyes.

Amelia had already given her to understand that she strongly suspected the nature

of the friendship existing between her and Alfred. "On his side, my dear," she had said, "I am quite persuaded that there exists no feeling or fancy of which he has the least reason to be ashamed; but I do not think I could safely venture to say as much for you. Do not think, however, that I mean to be severe. You are still but a child, my little Julia, and I dare say are far from understanding how very disgraceful a volunteer passion on the part of a young lady is considered by well-conducted persons when they are grown up."

Could she interfere after this? Could she doubt for a moment that any thing, and every thing, she might say or do towards lifting the veil that now blinded the judgment of Alfred, would be attributed by Alfred himself (Miss Thorwold's commentary being at hand to help him) to the "disgraceful" passion she had attributed to her! Nay, there was something worse still, the dread of which must for ever keep Julia silent respecting her opinion of Miss Thorwold. How could she trust her own heart?

How could she herself be sure that her judgment was, indeed, as perfectly uninfluenced by her feelings as she believed it to be ?

With this fearful doubt at her heart, it was morally impossible for such a creature as Julia to stretch out her hand to save what she loved from destruction, although dreadfully sure that there was no one else in the world who could do it.

One little circumstance there was, which, trifling as it might be, compared with much that she had observed of a worse nature, she certainly did hope he might discover by means of his own eyes. Julia had been only two days in the house with Miss Thorwold, when she found out that the beautiful wild-rose tint on her cheek, was laid there by her own skilful hand. When first the idea arose, she rejected it, and blushed much deeper than the wild rose as she traced the suspicion to her heart, rather than to her eye. "Thy wishes, Ju, were father to that thought," she muttered, with great bitterness of indignation against herself. Nevertheless, the fact became so evident to her senses, certainly a little on the alert, that before many hours

more had increased their acquaintance with each other, there was not a loop-hole left into which her tender conscience would thrust her conviction of it. At sixteen and a half—especially if such an adventure as discovering rouge, where rouge is not intended to be seen, has never befallen the observer—the playing such sly tricks upon nature is considered a matter of very considerable atrocity, and our little novice thought that, if known to Alfred, it might go far towards convincing him that his Amelia was not exactly what he believed her to be—a consummation which, without the very slightest mixture of selfish feeling, she would have given her right hand to produce. But no, it was impossible—perfectly, absolutely impossible, that she should ever take upon her the task of telling Alfred, her too dearly loved Alfred, that if he could but open his eyes, he would be sure to see that the lady he loved was unworthy of him, and, therefore, that he was at liberty to turn round, and see it she herself were not more so.

It may be, after all, that Julia was to

blame in thus shrinking from making manifest, truths which she must have felt to be so important to the happiness of the friend she loved. But if all the casuists in the world had pointed this out to her at that time, she would have been incapable of acting otherwise.

It was, however, a very beautiful natural feeling that was at work within her; and it required more experience than she yet possessed, to show her that there may be occasions when a sterner line of conduct than any arising from personal considerations, let them be as generous as they will, must be followed, or mischief may ensue.

And so Miss Thorwold and her accomplished chaperon departed, leaving Alfred with the delightful hope of soon becoming the happy husband of the best, the sweetest, the most guileless, the most gentle-hearted, and the loveliest woman in the world.

* * * * *

The answer of Lord Ripley was every thing that Mrs. Knight wished it to be—accepting her invitation, expressing very lively

satisfaction at the excellent chance of getting rid of his troublesome niece, and tenderly grateful for the share she had had in it.

That of Lord William Hammond was not so long, but it was equally agreeable. It declared his resolution of being at Crosby at the time appointed, though all the powers of light and darkness combined, set themselves to prevent it, and under the heading of P.S. were the following words: "Do. If I do *not*, may I be doomed eternally to suffer torments worse (if possible!) than that of being chained in the body to one place, while my spirit is panting to be in another."

Mrs. Knight put the precious document into the hands of her fair friend, with something a good deal like a sneer upon her lips; but the younger lady perused it in a far different spirit. Triumph, hope, and joy flashed from her eyes, and it was a great pity that poor Alfred Dermont had not been beside her at that moment, for, if he had, there is every probability that she might, with much more than her usual sincerity, have made him aware of the real value she had for him.

CHAPTER VII.

THE Lords Ripley and William Hammond did not arrive at Crosby on the day of the archery meeting, nor on the day immediately preceding it—but one day earlier still, according to the invitations they had received; for Mrs. Knight was well acquainted with Lord Ripley's admirable taste in all things belonging to a gala, and, therefore, naturally thought that the wisest and most prudent thing she could do would be to give sufficient time for her to take advantage of this peculiar talent on the present occasion.

It may be thought that, considering her views for Miss Thorwold, she did not display an equal degree of discretion in naming the

same early day for the arrival of Lord William. But more than one reason existed which may account for this. In the first place, her conviction that Lord William Hammond had no more intention of marrying Miss Thorwold than of jumping over Westminster-bridge, made her feel that his passing a few hours more or less in her society could not really make any difference.

Secondly, it was quite impossible that she could profit by Lord Ripley's advice, if she did not in some way get rid of the troublesome Amelia; and, thirdly, nothing was more desirable than that the said troublesome Amelia should be kept in good humour during her uncle's visit; for if she were not, she would be likely to make various impertinent observations, either about his being their doll, or else about his staying there so long; all of which she was as likely as not to communicate to her aunt Ripley, if she found herself perfectly at leisure to write to her.

The nervous, anxious, hoping, and fearing Miss Thorwold had made up her mind to

believe that her first look into the eyes of Lord William Hammond would enable her to judge whether she had any hope of eventually winning him or not. And the result of that first look was such as to raise her from a very vacillating and see-saw sort of condition, very nearly balanced between fear and hope, into a state of more triumphant confidence in the gentleman's love and admiration, than she had ever enjoyed before.

Beyond all doubt his eyes were very eloquent eyes, and beyond all doubt they did, at that moment, express a prodigious deal of tender passion for the beautiful person who had set herself so earnestly to read them.

The two gentlemen arrived just in time to dress for dinner, and the *partie carrée* which followed was almost as agreeable as a *partie carrée* could be. Doubtless two *tête-à-têtes* might have been more agreeable still, but this, of course, could not be hoped for till the following day, when the lounging habits of such a pleasant house as that of Mrs. Knight was sure to afford opportunity for it.

Meanwhile, however, the evening which

this friendly party passed together was exceedingly agreeable, for they all appeared in good-humour, and perfectly well disposed to be amiable. It was, indeed, impossible that any gentleman in the world, being an uncle, could be less in the way of a lady, being his niece, than Lord Ripley was in that of Miss Thorwold. That she flirted outrageously with Lord William was as evident to the viscount as it was to Lord William himself, but that judicious nobleman, though standing in *loco parentis* to the beauty, was of too indulgent a temper to feel any sort of displeasure on that account towards her, even though he was really almost as anxious as it was possible an uncle could be, that nothing should interfere to prevent her marriage with the young gentleman whose addresses had been so pleasantly announced to him.

One little hint, however, he thought it might be as well to throw out, as well for Lord William's safe conduct as her own. Lord Ripley, like his acute friend, Mrs. Knight, had long ago given up all hope of Amelia's ever becoming Lady William Ham-

mond; and therefore, he very justly thought, although there could be no reason why they should not amuse themselves by a little innocent flirtation, if they liked it, that it might be desirable to enlighten his fascinating lordship on the young lady's approaching marriage, in order to prevent his putting himself too conspicuously forward as her adorer when her *future* should be present.

With this object in view, he said, with the most easy, good-natured, *nonchalante* manner imaginable. "I say, Hammond, we all know what winning ways you have, and how extremely capable you are of making fair ladies forget that there is any body present but yourself. This is all vastly well, as long as we are *en petite comité* here, but it may be just as well to inform you, *mon cher*, that the day after to-morrow you will have the honour of being introduced to a certain Mr. Alfred Dermont, a well-born youth, with a handsome estate, who aspires to the hand of my fair niece. I am so well pleased by this news, that I fully intend to pinch myself a little, in order to make

Amelia a present of a few thousands on the happy occasion. So I give you warning, noble sir, that I shall take it very particularly ill, if you do ought to fill the young man's head with jealous fears, at the great risk of pushing out all matrimonial projects thereby. Do you understand?"

"Oh! perfectly, my lord," was the reply, and it was spoken in a tone as light and airy as that in which the address that produced it had been uttered.

But Amelia, whose eye was eagerly fixed upon his countenance, saw that he changed colour; and when Lord Ripley, satisfied that he had fully performed his duty, turned away, in order to begin a new game of chess with Mrs. Knight, she had the unspeakable happiness of receiving such a furious glance from his expressive eyes, as failed not to convince her that he was suffering at that moment from a pang of jealousy which could not possibly exist without love.

Nor was she mistaken in this; such love as Lord William Hammond was capable of feeling, she had certainly inspired, and he

had long been convinced that this passion was fully returned.

More than once, in the course of the last year, he had very nearly made up his mind to propose to her ; but at forty years of age, a man thinks more deliberately of this act, before he commits it, than a man of twenty ; and such a multitude of important suggestions presented themselves between the impassioned thought and the more deliberate act, that at length he decided that he would not " be such a confounded fool for any woman in Christendom," and thenceforward, he had contented himself by betraying just enough of his passionate admiration to keep her in constant expectation of his betraying more, while he took care to make her preference for him, over every other man that approached her, sufficiently obvious to prevent any other man from seriously thinking of her for a moment.

It is probable that his lordship was not himself fully aware how much he should really dislike her marrying any one else, for he felt perfectly satisfied that his influence

was such, as to render such an event impossible ; and he was now as violently indignant at finding he was mistaken, as if his own conduct had given him all the right in the world to expect her eternal constancy.

Having favoured her with the expressive glance above mentioned, he got up, and walked out of the room. For a short period after his departure, Amelia felt the most triumphant certainty that her experiment had completely answered ; and her delight was only tempered by a sudden feeling of self-reproach for having never tested his attachment in the same manner before. It was indeed true, that no similar opportunity had ever occurred since their acquaintance began. But her honest conscience told her that this ought not to have prevented the experiment, for that it would have been easy enough to have invented an offer of marriage, without receiving it.

But neither her self-congratulations, nor her self-reproaches, could long make the absence of Lord William at such a moment endurable ; and perceiving that the game of chess ap-

peared to be going on with very earnest attention on both sides, she ventured to rise, and leave the room. It was not till she had endured some very painful moments of alarm, from the dreadful idea that Lord William had left the house never to re-enter it, that she discovered that he had in fact gone very little "farther than a wanton's bird," being parading, by the light of the moon, on a broad gravel-walk behind the house. It was the month of July, and the weather very fine, and therefore the beautiful Miss Thorwold, London-bred lady as she was, feared not, under the shelter of a garden shawl of Mrs. Knight's, which lay conveniently on the hall table, to sally forth, and brave the breeze of evening, and the angry gentleman together.

"You drive me to strange measures, my lord, in order to obtain five minutes' conversation with you," said she, coming upon him unexpectedly from under the shadow of the portico.

"The driving comes not from me, madam," he replied, with a good deal of melodramatic solemnity.

"Upon my word, Lord William, it will be quite too absurd if you and I can do nothing better to amuse ourselves in this charming sylvan retreat than get up a quarrel. Considering how short a time has elapsed since I had the honour of seeing you last, I cannot but think you have made great haste to grow disagreeable," said she.

"The time has been long enough, Miss Thorwold, to enable you to do a great deal of business," he replied. "Permit me to wish you joy."

"Is it not a very strange caprice in fortune, that the only man in the whole world, who has the power of knowing how fearfully far I am at this moment from every feeling approaching joy,—is it not strange that *he* should be the first to utter the mocking word to me?" Amelia said this in a low, plaintive voice, which, under the circumstances, could hardly be listened to with indifference.

"Was it, then, to give me an opportunity of condoling with you, Miss Thorwold, that you invited me to make my appearance where I was to be greeted by tidings which

you well knew would stab me to the heart? Was this generous, Amelia?" returned his lordship.

"Would it have been more so," she replied, trembling with anxiety for his answer, "would it have been more generous, Lord William, had I done nothing to give you notice of the misery which threatened me till it was too late, I mean till it had come upon me, and in a way to make my groaning under it a crime? Is this what I ought to have done?"

"No, Amelia, no!" he replied, taking her hand. "The stroke that has stunned me now, might have killed me then. But why, oh! why is it necessary that I should hear such tidings at all? If what you have just uttered be true. Forgive the doubt, but it is inevitable. If it be true that you contemplate this hateful marriage with dislike, why have you submitted to the infernal arrangement? And knowing that you had so submitted, how could you have the barbarity to ask me to come for the express purpose of witnessing that which you perfectly

well knew would be more hateful to me than death."

"Why have I done this, Lord William? Why have I wished to see you once more before the doing so would be a sin? Can you ask me this?"

"But if your feelings, lovely, too lovely Amelia, are in truth such as your delicious words might lead me to hope," he replied, "why have you consented to accept this detestable alliance? Why had you not the courage to refuse him?"

Now this was a direct question to which it was not at all easy to give a direct answer, and Miss Thorwold had to draw her pocket-handkerchief from her pocket, and even use it, or seem to use it, for several seconds before she could give any answer at all; but at length she said, with a good deal of very pretty and proper reluctance: "It is far, very far from my inclination, Lord William, to say any thing which may seem to throw blame upon my uncle, but unfortunately it is impossible to answer your question without it. I was early left, as I believe you know, an orphan,

to his sole care and protection, and he has ever been, with one only exception, as kind and indulgent to me as possible, but that one exception has been the torment of my life. Unhappily for my peace and tranquillity I have had very many advantageous proposals of marriage, but hitherto, although not without a good deal of troublesome remonstrance, I have been permitted to refuse them all. But now it seems as if Lord Ripley were suddenly weary of the charge which these continued refusals appear likely to throw upon him permanently, for on hearing of Mr. Dermont's offer, and the splendid proposal for settlements which accompanied it, he is come down armed with all the authority his relationship gives him, and fully determined to use it for the purpose of forcing me to accept this young man. I have had recourse, as heretofore, to tears and entreaties, but now it is all in vain, and he has deliberately told me that if I still refuse to accept this young man, he shall send me to board with a methodistical old spinster cousin of my mother's, who lives in a little town in North Wales. All I could obtain was permission to postpone

giving my final answer till after Mrs. Knight's fête. Can you then wonder that I should at last hesitate? Can you wonder that this Welsh home should seem full of terror to me? Or can you wonder, Hammond, that, as I said before, I should wish to see you once more before it was a sin to do so?"

The most pathetic actress that ever lived could scarcely have spoken these sentences in a more touching manner than Miss Thorwold. She appeared to weep, but it was gentle, not violent weeping; the former being sure to touch and melt the heart of man, and the latter to revolt and harden it. And as she softly murmured these words, and softly wept, as an accompaniment, he (very softly too) permitted his arm to steal round her waist; and when she ceased he ventured, as the only consolation, perhaps, that he could offer, to draw her towards him, and to impress a very passionate kiss upon her lips.

It is possible that his lordship, though certainly possessing considerable experience, was not fully aware of the danger of giving way to tender feelings by moonlight, with a

nobly allied young lady for his companion; for before they returned into the house, he had done what, when he went out of it, he was very far from intending; he had, in short, with some few conditions annexed, rendered the fair Amelia the very happiest of women, by making her an offer, not only of his heart, but of his hand also.

A few moments of very ecstatic sensibility on both sides, followed this long wished for, and long-delayed proposal; and then the lady insisted upon it, despite all that the gentleman could urge to the contrary, that they should return to the drawing-room. As it now became quite evident that she was in earnest, he ceased his importunities to prevent it; but, as they were approaching the door, he detained her long enough under the portico which sheltered it, to exact from her a promise that she would not inform Mrs. Knight of what had passed between them, until after he should have had an opportunity of opening his heart respecting one or two particular circumstances necessary for her to know more fully than her prudish caution would now give her leisure to do.

With this request she promised scrupulously to comply ; and it was then arranged between them, that they should set out upon a tête-à-tête ramble in the grounds, immediately after breakfast on the morrow ; after which, he said, she should be at liberty to report his proposal both to her uncle and her friend.

Never, perhaps, had Amelia Thorwold looked so radiantly beautiful, as when, by the light of a few brilliant lamps, Lord William Hammond looked at her, for the first time, as his affianced wife. There was a sort of passionately tender triumph in her fine eyes, and a smile of such new-born happiness upon her lips, that the most indifferent of men could not have looked at her without admiration. Lord William was immeasurably far from being the most indifferent of men, and he certainly did think, as he watched the graceful movements of her perfect form, and the matchless loveliness of her charming face, that if beauty could excuse a man for committing matrimony, he might venture to stand forth as a Benedict before the assembled world.

Mrs. Knight, though still sitting before the chess-table, and having actually a piece in her hand, as if in act to move it, was roused to attention and to admiration, too, by the more than common charm of her look and manner. But although she had strong suspicions that all her own predictions had proved false, and that all the radiance which beamed from Amelia's face was produced by happy love, she was too faithful a confidante to say a word to Lord Ripley till she had been informed by words, as well as looks, that there was, indeed, something to tell. But, to say truth, she was dying with impatience, and the tea, and the wine and water, and the biscuits were all hurried over and despatched with unwonted celerity, so that Mrs. Knight and Miss Thorwold found themselves standing vis-à-vis on the top of the stairs, each with a bed-candle in her hand, in a wonderfully short time after the conclusion of the garden scene.

"Have you any thing to tell me, Amelia?" said Mrs. Knight, in an eager whisper. "But it is folly to ask—I know you have. Shall

I come with you into your room, or will you follow me to mine?"

"Neither, my dearest Mrs. Knight, neither!" replied Amelia, endeavouring not to smile. "I do assure you that I know nothing as yet. In short, there is nothing for me to say to you to-night—excepting that I am not absolutely without hope—only, dearest, you must do your best to engage Lord Ripley to-morrow morning. If you will manage to let Hammond and me have a tête-à-tête walk in the shrubberies to-morrow, I will confess to you that I do not think it impossible but I *may* have something to amuse you with before we ring for our Abigails at dressing time. But though I have nothing to tell, I have enough to think of, my dear friend, therefore give me a kiss, and wish me good night. If I *should* prove right, my dear, I hope you will not be *very* angry with me."

"At any rate, Amelia, I will endeavour to conquer my displeasure. But you are a tiresome girl not to tell me all now. Nevertheless, good night!" And the asked-for kiss was given and received, in the most affectionate style possible.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE appointed meeting, which was to afford the affianced lovers their promised tête-à-tête, was punctually kept on both sides; the gentleman, however, was, as he ought to have been, the first who arrived at the place of meeting, which was a pretty little grove, with a well-matted root-house in the middle of it, having a gray marble tombstone, erected to the memory of a favourite dog, placed at a little distance before it, as an object which might at once please the eye and touch the heart.

Within this pretty root-house, Lord William Hammond had placed himself in order to find shelter from "the orb of day," as

well as from all other orbs which might chance to be curiously revolving in their orbits about the premises. As soon as he descried the waving garments of Amelia, as she entered by a path which gave her and her graceful movements fully to the view of any eyes within the root-house, he made a movement as if to meet her—but he thought better of it, and remaining still unseen himself, behind the rude trellis-work, which, by the help of woodbines and roses, sheltered the termination of the seat that surrounded the edifice, he indulged in a few minutes steady contemplation of her charming figure. A skilful interpreter of the expression of human features might, perhaps, have found in those of the noble lover as he gazed, something analogous to that of one deeply interested in the event of a race, and enjoying the advantage of seeing one of the intended performers in it, trotted out for his gratification.

If his examination of the fair creature approaching were, indeed, made after this critical manner, it is impossible but he must

have felt himself superlatively happy in the promised possession of such a gem. And, in truth, his lordship did, as he gazed, become more than ever convinced that Amelia Thorwold was, beyond all question, one of the loveliest women in creation.

This conviction was not only satisfactory, but exceedingly well timed ; for his lordship had not passed a night of unbroken sleep, but had, on the contrary, been tormented by many waking doubts, as to whether he had not been a most confounded fool to entangle himself at last. But now, the same feeling which had led him on to the desperate extremity of proposing marriage on the preceding evening, returned upon him in full force. In short, he admired the lady too much to relish the idea of her becoming the wife of any one else ; and having, at length, once again solemnly pledged his determination that this should not be, with all the solemnity that a deep imprecation could give, he started from his retreat, and stepped forth upon the mossy turf to meet her.

“ My loveliest Amelia !” he exclaimed, as

he again ventured to throw his arm around her, and led her to the sheltered seat he had left. "My loveliest Amelia! How vain, how utterly vain is every effort that the very wisest among us can make to resist fascination such as yours! It is scarcely possible, my dearest love, to imagine an act more utterly devoid of common sense, and common prudence, than my offering myself in marriage to you. I hope and trust my sweet friend, that you already know the lamentable fact, that I am, in fashionable phrase, an absolute beggar. I rather think, indeed, that the son of an English duke never does actually go, with his wife and family, into a workhouse; nor is it at all in the ordinary course of things, I fancy, that the niece of a viscount should do so either; and it is upon this sort of mysterious dependence, loveliest, that we must rest, for, upon the honour of a noble gentleman, I know of no other."

"It matters not," replied Amelia, suffering her beauteous head to drop upon his shoulder. "Such a dependence as you speak of, my dear lord, vague and mysterious as

you may think it, is a thousand times more to be depended on than one of the poor little gentry incomes of one or two thousand a year perhaps, which all the world are ready to declare *ought* to be enough, yet which never can by possibility be found so by people of any real fashion. If you are ready to take the chance which our mutual position gives us, of keeping our noble heads above water, I am. Nor would I change the prospect for any other that could be offered me !”

So noble a sentiment as this, could not, of course, be listened to with indifference by the happy man to whom it was addressed, and a few rapturous caresses were naturally the result of it. And then his lordship, rousing the sterner portion of his character to the performance of the task, for the sake of which the interview was appointed, withdrawing the arm which encircled his affianced bride, and contenting himself by retaining possession of her hand, said gravely, “Now, then, my dear Amelia, we must speak together frankly and rationally, as people

ought to do who have taken the desperate resolution of setting off together upon a very perilous expedition ; and I shall venture to do so with the more confidence of being listened to reasonably, because I feel that it is impossible I should mistake your motive for marrying me. You must love me for myself, because I frankly tell you that I have nothing else to offer."

These words produced a gentle pressure from the fair fingers of the delicate hand which were entwined with his, and having properly responded to this, he resumed the harangue, which for half an instant it had interrupted.

" Presuming, as I naturally must do," he said, " that this enchanting hypothesis is the true one, I have the less fear of telling you, sweetest, that our union must at first be strictly secret."

" Secret ?" repeated Miss Thorwold, a good deal startled. " *Private*, I presume you mean, my dear lord ?"

" No, my love," he replied, " I mean very literally what I say. If we marry at

all, my sweet Amelia, It must be *secretly*, and that to the very fullest extent of the term. You will not suspect that I mean to enact the part of a wicked hero in a romance, and intend to compass my wicked ends by means of a surreptitious marriage. That sort of stuff is not at all in our line, I should think. No, no, we will have our banns lawfully published in one of the large suburban parish churches, where even the aristocratic names of William Hammond and Amelia Thorwold, will be run over amidst scores of others, without exciting the least degree of dangerous attention in any of the worthy hearers. This accomplished, we will be married in the same church; and vitally important as it will be to me that our marriage should remain for the present concealed, I shall have no fear whatever that any tidings of it will reach our own circle from such a parish as I mention. At any rate, we must, if we venture to marry at all, venture also to run this risk."

"May I ask you, Lord William," replied Amelia, gravely, "what are the reasons

which render so very singular a proposal necessary?"

"I should have hoped, dearest, that your confidence in me was such as would have rendered such a question unnecessary. And I confess, sweet love, that I think the perfect openness with which I have avowed to you the state of my affairs, ought to have made it so. Nevertheless, I am quite willing to prove still further, my dislike of all disguise between people who stand to each other in the relation that we hope to do. The reason, Amelia is, that my ducal brother has taken it into his head that I may, if I so please, obtain in marriage the magnificently wealthy hand of Miss Upton Savage."

"Marry you to Miss Upton Savage!" exclaimed Amelia, vehemently. "Is it possible that your brother can have conceived the idea of so horrible a sacrifice. Why, my dearest Lord William! the creature squints, besides that enormous quantity of fiery red hair. Marry Miss Upton Savage! You must be jesting."

"The subject has caused me too much

vexation, my love, to permit me to jest upon it. But I will fairly confess to you, that I think the proposal, on the part of my brother, that I should make so tremendous a sacrifice, is an unkindness, to say the very least of it, which fully justifies my playing him a little trick in return. He knows that I have debts to the amount of some thousands hanging over me—don't colour so violently at the name of debts, my dear love; be very sure that there is not a man of real fashion, throughout England, especially if he be a younger brother, who is *not* in debt. You really must not look so very rustic, as to appear frightened at that."

Amelia smiled sweetly as she listened to these words, and immediately recovered her composure.

"Well then, now that you look like yourself again," resumed her noble lover, "I will venture to go on. Watertown, as I have told you, my love, is aware of my embarrassments. He knows me well enough too, to be perfectly aware that even if I were capable of marrying that horrible queen of the witches,

Miss Upton Savage, I most certainly would not propose to her without acknowledging my debts, and I believe he suspects that such an avowal would not go far towards rendering the lovely creature propitious. Therefore, and with the hope of this delightful union before his eyes, he has generously signified to me his intention of helping me over this little difficulty, provided I will promise to propose to her as soon as this is done. To this proposal I have as yet returned no answer, having determined to prove to him by my silence the indignation which I felt. But now I certainly feel greatly inclined to accept it, by telling him that on condition of his paying my debts I am ready to promise that I will offer myself, such as I am, to the heiress. I will not deny, dear Amelia, that his grace is tolerably correct in believing that the charmer has already given reason enough for me to suppose that she would make no difficulty of accepting me, such as I am now, though I do not suspect she will be likely to inspire you with any jealous uneasiness from the fear of my offering myself to her such as I shall

be when these debts are paid, provided, dearest, that you will consent to make a married man of me in the interval. But if this is to be done I need not, I think, point out to you any farther the dire necessity of its being done secretly."

Lord William ceased, but Miss Thorwold did not reply. She was in truth dreadfully shocked and disappointed. She certainly loved Lord William as much as she was capable of loving any thing, and this included a very considerable degree of passionate fondness. But it was not only to the gratification of her affection that she had looked, when she so ardently entered upon the project of eliciting from his reciprocal affection an offer of marriage.

She had spoken truly when she said, in describing Lord William Hammond to Mrs. Knight, that he was "the darling of Almack's, the pride of the park, the glory of the drawing-room, the pet of the boudoir, and the sovereign of the Opera;" he really was all this, and it cannot be denied that the idea of all the envy she should inspire by

becoming the wife of all this, had some share in the vehement desire which she felt for obtaining the honour.

But how was this dearly valued triumph to be obtained were she to consent to marry secretly? The assurance, though from such very good authority, that the object of her affections was a beggar, produced little or no effect in checking her ardent wish for the connexion, for she had faith unbounded in that mysterious power before alluded to, by which the brothers of dukes and the nieces of viscounts are protected from the matter-of-fact evils of poverty; but the marrying secretly was almost to put herself beyond the reach of this benign influence, and for a few moments she was too much confounded to be capable of replying.

"You will not speak to me, Amelia?" said Lord William, in a tone which had less of wounded tenderness than of offended pride in it. "Then I think it will be better for us both that this interview should end, and not this interview only, but all reference to the subject which led to it. Nothing, Miss

Thorwold, nothing but a very passionate degree of attachment on both sides could possibly render such a proposal as I have made to you endurable to either of us. Believe me, you cannot be more aware than I am, that we may both of us do better in a worldly point of view, than by indulging our affections, shut ourselves out for a time at least from all those pleasures of society which I believe we are both of us particularly well calculated to enjoy. I tell you no more than the truth when I declare to you, that I have never seen a woman whom I have admired as much as I do you, and the proposal I have made, however far it may be from what you have a right to expect, shows the strength of the sentiment you have inspired vastly more than any ordinary, every-day sort of offer could do, made by a man without embarrassments, and having no reason in the world why he should not indulge himself by asking the woman he preferred to become his wife. However, I beg to assure you that it is not my intention, Miss Thorwold, to attempt winning you by

importunity. I feel that I have given you proof of a degree of love that most people might think amounted to madness. And I am by no means sure that I am not of that opinion myself. Perhaps, were you to give me a proof of equal love, people might say that you were mad too. I put the question before you very plainly, Amelia, and all I can do beyond this is leaving the power of deciding upon it in your hands instead of my own."

Whether the cavalier tone of this speech was the genuine result of the gentleman's own temper, or only assumed in consequence of his sagacious perception of that of the lady, must be left in doubt, but in either case its effect was all he could desire, for it left the beautiful Amelia firmly resolved to do every thing he asked her, whether madly or not, rather than run the risk of losing him, and of being left to that detested "doing better," to which he had alluded, for both of them.

But she was too highly finished a woman of bon ton to pronounce such a decision im-

mediately, unless absolutely driven to it by necessity, and she therefore replied, in a voice of melting softness, "If I feel averse to accepting a proposal which has all the rashness, as well as all the courage of irresistible attachment in it, Lord William, you ought to be aware that it is as much for your sake as my own. Tell me, dearest friend, might not our union take place under circumstances less objectionable, if it were delayed for a month or two?"

"Beyond all question such delay would show our wisdom," replied his lordship, suddenly rising, "and I have only to apologise for having suffered passion so greatly to obscure that respectable quality, as to have hazarded the proposal which has so much shocked and offended you."

And, in saying this, his lordship put himself in the position and attitude proper for immediate retreat.

Though the existence of the fair Amelia had not passed without some little difficult points, which required ready wit to get over,

she had never before found herself called upon to act with promptitude, decision, and skill, so much as at this moment.

This was not the first time that very unequivocal love-making had taken place between the parties; but it was the first time in which any thing at all approaching to an offer of marriage had been the consequence, and Amelia now felt a degree of terror at the idea that this offer, so long, so anxiously, so almost despairingly looked for, should now *come to nothing*, though it *was* come at last, which almost overwhelmed her faculties, and threw her into a state of agitation which it required a very powerful effort to overcome. This effort, however, was not wanting, but was made, on the contrary, with a degree of resolute firmness which indicated considerable force of character.

Not for a moment, not for half a moment, did Amelia remain under the paralysing effects of an emotion too strong to leave her power to act, and no sooner had this rapid sensation passed than she was herself again, and sufficiently mistress of her looks, words,

and actions, to give her a very fair chance of bringing matters once more to the point at which she had so rashly given her lover reason to think that he might draw back again if he would.

“Stay, Hammond! stay!” she exclaimed, in a voice of agony. “Oh! do not torture thus a heart that loves you! Oh! Lord William! can you indeed leave me to the detested fate with which I am threatened—threatened! Oh, more than threatened, William! As surely as I live I shall be forced into the arms of that detested man, if you do not interfere to prevent it!”

And here, having wound her arms round him to prevent his escape, she sunk on the rude floor at his feet, and, throwing off the bonnet which had become accidentally untied, her beautiful hair fell in a waving shower upon her shoulders, while her arms clasped his knees, and her beautiful eyes were thrown up to his with a glance of the most passionate tenderness.

He looked down upon her for a moment in silence, but she had the satisfaction of per-

ceiving that there was no particular expression of coldness in the glance he gave her in return.

"Interfere, Amelia!" he exclaimed—"Cruel girl! What, then, do you call interference? Have I not offered to you my hand, my name, my rank? Have I not offered all—all that fate and fortune have left me? And how have you received the offer? Was it in a way to make me indeed believe myself beloved?"

"Forgive me! Dearest, and only beloved, forgive me! I know not what I said! But I unsay it all; if, indeed, my words so belied my heart as to make you doubt the sincerity of my love. Oh, Hammond! Hammond! must I be the wife of another? Must other arms than yours enclose me?" This touching appeal was answered by Lord William's raising her in his arms, and very tenderly embracing her, an act which she now seemed too plaintively submissive either to resist or resent.

"Let us not torture ourselves any farther, my lovely girl!" he exclaimed. "I would

that I had a throne, Amelia, that I might place you on it beside me. But such wishes, as you well know, love, are all in vain. There is one way, and one way only, in which I may make you my wife; and if, indeed, you love me one half as passionately as I adore you, I cannot believe that you will refuse me. Say but that you consent, Amelia! Say but that you will submit, for a while, to hide this lovely form from every eye but mine, and I will not lose an hour in making such arrangements as shall secure our happiness beyond the power of fate. Speak, my love, will you be my secret bride?—my hidden treasure?—the hoarded joy of my existence?"

"Oh, William! William!" she replied, "I have no prudence left. I have struggled hard, and done my very best to be discreet; but it is all in vain; one word, one look from you can overthrow all my wisdom. Yes, dearest, yes! I am willing to become your wife, as secretly as the solemn nature of the act will permit."

"And my adoration, sweetest, shall, if pos-

sible, be proportionate to the blessing you bestow. And now, then, my beautiful, let us examine a little what it will be necessary to do, in order for me to possess my promised treasure as speedily as possible. Do you not think that, in the humour your uncle seems to be in, at hearing of this young squire's proposal, you could extract thirty or forty pounds from him, on pretence of wanting to refresh your wardrobe for the fêtes which are doubtless about to be given in the neighbourhood? Do you not think that, on such a plea, he would be somewhat more than usually generous, Amelia?"

"I think he might," she replied, laughing. "It would be so shocking, you know, if I were obliged to appear shabbily dressed before the eyes of my future papa and mamma-in-law."

"Oh! horrible, my love. In short, I shall reckon upon you for a little aid in that line; and I shall work my respected brother a little in the same way. For, over and above the promised liquidation of my debts,

he really must assist me in my efforts to make a decent appearance in the eyes of the charming Miss Upton Savage. In this way, I have no doubt that we shall muster a hundred or two—quite enough, my lovely one, to make us supremely happy till these debts of mine are paid—our marriage announced, and we started fresh, by the aid of our nobility and our rich relatives.”

This last gay phrase sufficed at once to set at rest a vile little swarm of stinging anxieties concerning her own debts, which from time to time, in the intervals of her tender ecstasies, had been buzzing about the heart of the fair Amelia.

“By aid of our nobility,” thought she, “it will be easy enough, I question not, to keep my dog-like creditors at bay. Tradespeople are notoriously the most interested and money-loving set of monsters on the earth. And I should like to see them making an enemy of the elegant Lady William Hammond—niece to Lord Ripley—sister to the Duke of Watertown, the mirror of fashion and the queen of beauty.”

These thoughts so gladdened her heart, that her eyes shot forth their beams amidst a burst of laughter, as she replied, "I have no fears at all for the future, dearest! You are the only younger child, you know: and all the world says, that my lady duchess your mother, had a very handsome fortune, which, of course, must come to you. This prospect will be quite sufficient to reconcile my uncle to the match, whenever it suits your convenience to make it known to him. And then, of course, he must do something for me."

This "something of course" had most assuredly not been overlooked by Lord William, any more than the duchess's jointure had by the beautiful Amelia. But on his side Lord William happened to know that he had already pretty well forestalled all that was to come to him upon her grace's demise, by means of taking up money upon the reversion at enormous interest. And on her side the charming Amelia was pretty tolerably sure that, beyond a few hundred pounds, perhaps, for finery, her noble uncle

would never bestow upon her another sou, provided the disgrace of her going to a workhouse, would fall first upon her noble family, before it could come to him. They had, however, something much more agreeable and animating to talk about than correcting each other's financial errors concerning their respective relations. For all the dear details of the secret marriage were to be canvassed and arranged.

"And now, my fairest, let us come a little to particulars, as to how we can best arrange this most delicious scheme," said Lord William, replacing her upon the mossy bench, and once again encircling her slender waist with his arm. "Tell me, have you any attached trustworthy friend in London? A humble friend will suit our purpose best. Tell me, love, do you know any such person?"

"Indeed I do," replied Amelia, remembering her favourite, Mrs. Stedworth, with infinite satisfaction. "I know one of the very best creatures that ever lived, and one too so affectionately attached to me, that I

believe there is nothing I could ask her to do, which she would refuse."

"That's well," returned his lordship, "and do you think, Amelia, that you can rely upon her faith as steadfastly as on her affection? In short, do you think she may be safely trusted with a secret on which so much depends?"

"Indeed, I do! Besides, she is a person who gains her living by being considered as trustworthy; and should she prove false to us, I have influence enough to ruin her already, as she well knows, and she has quite good sense enough to perceive that I am not likely to have less by becoming your wife. Oh, yes, I am quite sure we may trust her," cried the confiding Amelia.

"Gains her living by being considered as trustworthy?" repeated Lord William, with an odd sort of expression of countenance. "What species of trust is it, Miss Thorwold, that ladies of fashion repose in a person who, by your account, exists by keeping their secrets?"

Amelia laughed. "Oh, you abominable

man!" she replied. "How impossible it is for a woman to speak to a person so superlatively wicked as you are, without danger. But set your mind at rest, my dear Othello, upon the nature of the confidences existing between poor dear Mrs. Stedworth and her fashionable friends. It is not only of a nature perfectly innocent, but extremely meritorious into the bargain. I dare say that, like all the other men in the world, you occasionally indulge yourself in philippics against the wasteful extravagance of women of fashion in the article of dress; but I declare to you, that though we think it more dignified and proper to keep the matter rather secret, we ought to be considered as the most condescendingly prudent, provident, and economical creatures in the world, solely upon the strength of what Mrs. Stedworth could testify in our favour, if we chose to let her talk about it. What think you, my dear lord, of our rarely making up our innocent young hearts to the bold measure of purchasing an expensive new dress without taking measures to meet the demand

upon our poor, dear little purses by the sale of an old one? It is true, upon my honour, Lord William, and this good woman is *the* individual, par excellence, to whom we all apply on such occasions."

"I have heard something of the kind before," said Lord William, with a playful smile, "and I can easily imagine that such a person may make an exceedingly useful acquaintance. But how do you mean to employ her on the present occasion, dearest? Has she a sort of dwelling that might serve us as a temporary residence?"

"Exactly that, my dear friend. Her house is an extremely respectable looking abode, and the letting a part of it is, I know, occasionally a source of profit to her. But the great advantage I anticipate from my acquaintance with this excellent creature," pursued Amelia, "is the being able to take refuge with her when I leave Mrs. Knight. For, of course, under our present circumstances, it would not do for me to ask for hospitality from any of my fashionable friends."

"Gracious Heaven, no!" returned Lord William, in an accent which showed how greatly he seemed likely to value the safe-keeping of their secret.

"If this woman be really such a person as you describe, she will be invaluable to us, Amelia. I will arrange every thing relative to our marriage, and will take care to sleep the necessary number of nights in the parish where I intend the banns shall be published. Published, dearest, exactly to those who shall hear and not understand. I will manage all that. But it is you, my love, who must arrange the mode by which you think you may best elude all eyes and ears for a month or two. I should think, however, that the safest thing would be for you to go abroad—for us both to go abroad, I mean, as soon as we are married; that is, provided you know any one whom you can mention to your uncle, Mrs. Knight, et cætera, as having invited you."

"I understand. Yes, it certainly would be best—and I have but one objection to it," replied Amelia. "The truth is, Lord Wil-

liam, that I positively dare not confess to my uncle, and his dear friend, Mrs. Knight, that I have decided upon refusing Mr. Dermont. I am quite positive that I should never get another sixpence from Lord Ripley—that is, as long as he is kept in ignorance of my marriage with you. If you thought I might venture to take them into our confidence, all would be easy enough.”

“Impossible!” cried Lord William, again starting up, and thereby throwing Miss Thorwold into a new agony of terror, lest she should lose him. “Impossible, Amelia! If you persist in recommending this, I must, passionately as I adore you, rouse up my courage to the bidding you an eternal farewell. I have told you already, with the most perfect confidence, that ruin, irretrievable ruin would fall upon me did my obstinate and obdurate brother only suspect that I thought of marrying any other than Miss Upton Savage. I cannot, I will not risk this; and it is as much for your sake as my own that I refuse to do so. Either swear to me that you will have no other

confidant than the woman you mention—who I doubt not is sufficiently in the habit of keeping secrets of all kinds to make her well-paid promise safe—either do this, or give me one last kiss, and let me leave you for ever.”

“ No, Lord William, no!—you shall not leave me. I will promise every thing, risk every thing, even life itself, rather than lose you! Only tell me exactly what you wish me to do, and I swear to you that it shall be done, let the danger and difficulty be what they may.”

Such a declaration could only be answered as Lord William answered it. And, after the tender emotion produced by this little scene had subsided, they both set themselves to talk very quietly over the minute particulars of the rather thorny enterprise which they were about to enter upon. It was not very easy to make out the whole plan so clearly and practically coherent, as to avoid all risk of blundering when it came to be put in action; but it really seemed as if they were both gifted by nature with precisely

such a spirit of intrigue as that which runs in so brilliant a manner through the generality of French farces, by which obstacles are converted into aids, and difficulties of all kinds vanish like the vapours of morning before the influence of the all-conquering sun. In another half-hour, every particular was completely arranged.

Lord William failed not again to impress upon the mind of his devoted Amelia, that the first active step she had to take was the attack on the purse of Lord Ripley.

“I am horridly hard up, my sweet love,” said he, “and we therefore must both of us exert our skill in the extracting process. Lovers, you know, are said to feel singular delight from contriving to employ themselves exactly in the same way, at the same moment—by looking at the moon, or kissing a rose-bud, or some such pretty foolery. And may not we, dearest, indulge our fond fancies exactly in the same manner? We have agreed, you know, that I am to receive a letter by the twelve o'clock post to-day, obliging me to set off by the mail to-night,

in consequence of an earnest summons from my sick mother. I shall arrive early to-morrow morning in London, where his grace of Watertown still lingers, and trust me that if, exactly as the clock strikes two, you request a few minutes' private conversation with your uncle, and having obtained it, will forthwith proceed to work upon his feelings with all the skill you have, in order to convince him of the necessity of advancing a little ready money to enable you to make a decent appearance in the eyes of the wealthy personage you are about to marry—if you will do this, my sweet Amelia, we may both derive all the pleasure which the consciousness of being similarly engaged can bestow."

This was answered by so charming a smile as to suffice both as an offering to his wit, and a testimony of her admiring tenderness. And thus they went on, till it was fully time to think about dressing for dinner, pleasantly rehearsing plans which, as they will be brought before the reader in action, need not detain him any longer now.

It was fortunate for Lord William Hammond, and Miss Thorwold, that the uncle, and the friend of the latter, happened to have engaged again immediately after luncheon in another very interesting game of chess, which lasted till the half-hour bell gave them also notice that it was time to dress for dinner. And thus the long absence of the lovers happily escaped all commentary.

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. KNIGHT's party was exceedingly like most other parties, delighting some, displeasing others, and fatiguing all. Amelia, however, had a game to play, which being one of considerable importance, kept her *wide awake* to the very last moment that the company remained together. Miss Thorwold was, in fact, too happy, too triumphant, to feel fatigue, and the necessity she had been under, from the moment her favoured lover had left the house, of acting a difficult, a very difficult part, so far from wearing out her spirits seemed only to invigorate them.

To Alfred her conduct was equally safe and judicious. She received him, as well as

his father and mother, with an air of the most flattering distinction, and was even politely civil to Julia, whom the colonel had insisted upon bringing, despite her earnest assurances that she would rather stay at home.

But when the enamoured young man implored his Amelia to afford him a few minutes' private conversation, she had entreated him, in a manner which showed a bewitching consciousness of her own too great susceptibility, *to spare her*, at a moment when so many eyes were upon them! "I will not affect," she said, "to misunderstand you, and I should be sorry to believe that you could misunderstand me, but this is no time to explain ourselves further."

To her uncle she had addressed herself with equal skill and equal success. A draft for fifty pounds was the reward of her assuring him that all his trouble on her account would speedily be at an end, as the romance of her life, like that of every one's else, would soon terminate in the old-fashioned catastrophe of marriage.

To Mrs. Knight, when questioned, as of course she was very eagerly at the very first moment that found them alone together, after the sudden departure of Lord William, she replied by the seemingly plain, but really equivocal words: "All doubts about my final destination are at end now, my dearest Mrs. Knight, and you shall know every particular of my decisive conversation with Lord William; I shall not have the least scruple of repeating it to you, word for word, but it must not be now. I have suffered a good deal, I assure you, but it is all over and ended for ever. Were I, however, to go over it all again with you, I am quite certain that I should be perfectly unable to appear at your fête. Only let me assure you, without further discussion of the subject, that you cannot be more aware of the wisdom of my marrying than I am myself, and I have perfectly made up my mind that I will marry with as little loss of time as possible. You may depend upon it, my dear friend, that the time will come when I shall be delighted to talk over every thing

with you at full length, if you will let me; but for the present I shall only try to enjoy myself as much as I can."

Mrs. Knight looked and felt a good deal puzzled, but she knew her beautiful friend too well to believe that she would be likely to grow more communicative upon being requested to do so, and she therefore submitted to receive all she chose to say, without asking for more—a degree of forbearance which was the less difficult, because she felt persuaded that the business would end by Amelia's becoming the wife of Mr. Alfred Dermont, which, after all, was vastly more important than any communications she could possibly make respecting what had passed between her and Lord William Hammond, and so far all went well.

And then came the much more difficult business of announcing and arranging her departure. Lord Ripley had declared his intention of leaving Crosby on the morning after the fête, and of course his fair niece determined upon remaining there till after his departure. But the interval was not lost,

for it enabled her both to write to Mrs. Stedworth, and to receive her answer, which answer being in every way what she wished, rendered the expedition she meditated a much less nervous business than it would otherwise have been.

The post which arrived a few hours after the departure of her uncle brought her not only Mrs. Stedworth's epistle, but another which the fair heroine took care to open and read in the presence of Mrs. Knight, and while doing so she permitted a good deal of painful emotion to become visible.

"What have you got there, Amelia?" said her attentive friend. "It is very unusual to see you look so unbecomingly doleful about any thing."

"And it is very unusual," replied Miss Thorwold, "to receive such extremely unpleasant news. My poor friend, Caroline Marchmont, is declared to be in a very dangerous state; her lungs are thought to be affected, and I believe they are going to take her abroad. Poor dear girl! I cannot but feel this as a heavy misfortune at such a

moment. She is the only person of my own age that I ever formed any real intimacy with, and she would have been the greatest comfort possible to me just now. I had quite determined to go to her for a little while, the moment the time of my marriage was finally settled. It is a great, a very great disappointment to me."

Mrs. Knight smiled—she did rather more than smile, she very nearly laughed heartily, upon which Miss Thorwold looked at her with great indignation. "I have always thought," she said bitterly, "that a girl so young and lovely as Caroline, was not very likely to be a favourite with you, Mrs. Knight—female youth and beauty not being exactly what you are likely to pet most. But I confess I did not quite expect so very unfeeling a mark of your antipathy as you have now given. I shall be much obliged by your permitting me either to walk in the grounds, or to remain alone in my own room for the rest of the evening."

"Upon my word, Amelia, you are very ridiculous, and very incomprehensible," re-

turned Mrs. Knight, looking as if doubtful whether she should laugh or be angry. "As if I had not heard you abuse Caroline Marchmont a hundred times! You know, my dear, there is nothing which amuses me so much as affectation. But pray do not let us quarrel. And, in order to prevent it, you shall have patent right to walk, and to sit, upon Salisbury Plain, if you should chance to prefer it as a scene of sentiment to my poor drawing-room."

Miss Thorwold rose without uttering a word in reply, and walked out of the room. It was rather later than usual on the following morning, when Mrs. Knight descended to the breakfast-parlour; but, nevertheless, she was in no degree surprised at not finding Amelia there, as that fair creature was rather more than ordinarily partial to the soft and soothing qualities of a down pillow, and seldom left her room till drawn thence by a positive summons to the breakfast-table.

"Let Miss Thorwold be told that breakfast is ready," said Mrs. Knight.

The man who received this command re-

turned in a wondrously short space of time, almost so short, indeed, as to suggest the idea that the information he brought had been longer in his possession than he chose to confess; but be this as it may, he re-entered the breakfast-room, with a countenance of very theatric astonishment, and stammering out the words "Miss Thorwold is no where to be found, ma'am," handed a salver to his mistress with a letter upon it, adding, as she took it up, "That note, ma'am, was found upon her dressing-table."

Their little quarrel of the evening before immediately recurred to Mrs. Knight's recollection, and remembering the sort of terror in which her dear friend, Lord Ripley, seemed to live, for fear his beautiful niece should get into mischief, which might entail blame upon him, she exclaimed as she broke open the seal, "That horrid girl was born to be my torment!" A persuasion which probably was not altogether removed when she read the following lines:

"I can scarcely imagine any thing, Mrs. Knight, that could induce me to risk that

most vulgar of all adventures, a quarrel; but no extent of lady-like philosophy can, I am afraid, so completely still the temper (we will not say soothe it), as to prevent very painful sensations from arising when we meet with what is either rude or unfeeling. You will scarcely deny that I last night met with both from you. To avoid a repetition of this, I have determined to leave your house to-morrow morning, which will insure my escape from the double danger of showing resentment for what is past, and of suffering in the same way in future. Think not, however, that I have any intention or wish to sacrifice your pleasant society for ever. This is by no means the case. I purpose visiting the friend whose dangerous illness caused your unseemly mirth, and shall very probably accompany her abroad for a few weeks. The matrimonial prospects which are opening before me will, of course, account for the tone of independence as to my movements, which I consider myself called upon to assume. You will, I am sure, for the sake of more than one friend, explain *pro-*

perly to the family at the Mount the cause of my sudden departure. I sincerely hope we may meet again, under circumstances which shall enable us both to forget, in the most pleasant manner possible, the disagreeable scene which caused our separation. Yours, with unfailing consideration,

“AMELIA THORWOLD.”

That Miss Thorwold had indeed left the house, and that her trunks had already been sent for, from the little way-side public-house, from which the omnibus to the London railroad departed three times a-day, was easily ascertained by a few inquiries. But although that much was perfectly clear, and admitted of no mistake, Mrs. Knight still remained in a state of very tormenting uncertainty concerning the real motives of her late guest. No lady could have a much worse opinion of the temper of another, than Mrs. Knight had of that of Miss Thorwold; nevertheless, she could not “realise” the fact of her having been so deeply wounded, because her vehement expressions of sorrow

for the illness of Miss Caroline Marchmont had been met by a laugh.

That this rival beauty really was very ill, and had been ordered to a milder climate, she knew to be true, a correspondent of her own having mentioned it in a letter received by the early post that morning; but although a good deal of young-lady intimacy had existed between the beauties, Mrs. Knight remembered nothing in their intercourse which rendered such a proposal from Miss Thorwold at all probable. Yet how was it possible to substitute any other history for the one she had received? She certainly did remember the long rambles taken by Amelia and Lord William, which, from the little which the lady had said about it since, had, she had every reason to believe, terminated by at length convincing her that nothing beyond very idle gallantry was to be hoped for from him. Yet, even if she were mistaken in this, and that these long interviews had led to an explicit declaration, how was it possible to suppose that a gentleman of forty, and a lady of thirty, should think it necessary

to elope in order to become man and wife, when they both of them knew that there was nothing on earth to prevent their marrying whenever they pleased, such an event having, in fact, been often thought very probable by the friends on both sides.

But far more unlikely still did she think it, that Miss Thorwold should be guilty of any worse indiscretion. She had no doubt that Amelia liked Lord William Hammond better than any one else, but very far indeed was she from believing that any liking would induce her to sacrifice for its gratification her position in the world.

In short, after exerting her very acute faculties to the utmost to divine the real state of the case, she came at last to the conclusion that Amelia, finding that there was no chance of her ever becoming Lady William Hammond, had at length made up her mind to accept the hand of her younger lover; but that, still feeling his juvenile addresses to be a great bore, she had taken advantage of their last night's disagreement in order to ensure herself a release from it for a week or two.

She felt, indeed, that it was not unlikely that the self-willed beauty might think a week or two passed on the continent, though even with a sick friend, would be better than any more long visitations to the Mount, and on this point she was so well disposed to agree with her, that she amiably determined to plead her cause with her uncle, and make him agree with herself in thinking that, provided she consented to take the young gentleman at last, it was but fair to let her indulge herself in this last little spinster freak with impunity.

Before writing to Lord Ripley, however, in this amiable conciliatory spirit, she thought it would be as well to ascertain, beyond the possibility of blunder, on what terms she had parted with Alfred, and, for this purpose, she ordered her carriage at an hour that would bring her at the sure-to-be-at-home moment of luncheon to the Mount. As she approached the house she perceived the young man wandering in a very penseroso manner beneath some trees, which formed a pretty little grove at no great distance from the road.

Aware that she should have a much better chance of learning how matters really stood from Alfred than from his mother, she immediately stopped the carriage, got out of it, and joined him.

He changed colour as he saw her approach, and his handsome features expressed a feeling of uneasiness which, for the moment, alarmed her a good deal, but when they were near enough for him to extend his hand to welcome her, the manner in which he did this, and the tone in which he exclaimed, "Alone!" convinced her that all was, as yet, safe and well.

"Yes, I am alone, my dear Alfred!" she said, with an affectionate familiarity of manner which in an instant brought a smile of hope and gladness to his lips. "I am alone," she continued, "but there is nothing to cause uneasiness to any friend of my dear absent Amelia." And then, putting her arm with a charming elder-sister sort of intimacy under his, she added, "You must forgive me if I take too much for granted, dear Alfred, what I so ardently desire should be true. Tell me

at once, am I right in believing that you love my darling Amelia?"

"Love her, Mrs. Knight! Do I love her?" cried the enamoured youth. And no doubt it would have been a great relief to him could he have taken the liberty of exclaiming, "Oh earth! oh heaven! bear witness," and so forth; but he very judiciously stopped short in his rhapsody, and gently pressing her arm, added, "Never can I thank you enough, my dearest Mrs. Knight, for permitting me to tell you that I love, that I adore her! But why are you alone? Almost the last words which Amelia said to me, at Crosby, conveyed the delicious hope that she consented to listen to me; that she intended, angelic creature! to listen to me favourably. And it was my hope, this very day, to have thrown myself at her feet, and to have told her what, however, she knows full well already, that life would not be worth having unless blessed with the hope of possessing her."

"And your parents, dear Alfred?" said Mrs. Knight, with affectionate solicitude. "You must remember, my dear young friend,

that although our Amelia is no wealthy heiress, her noble connexions, her unequalled beauty, her adorable character, her charming talents, all conspire to make her friends expect that she shall be welcomed warmly by whatever family the affections of her heart may incline her to enter. Unless Colonel and Mrs. Dermont cordially unite their wishes with yours, Alfred, you must prepare yourself for the most positive refusal. No, Amelia might, from the tenderness of her nature, sink into an early grave from disappointed love, but never would she enter a family which refused to welcome her with the warm affection which she must be conscious she so well deserves."

"Refuse? Oh! my dearest Mrs. Knight! you do not know my father and mother, or you would not for an instant believe such unnatural conduct possible. They know my presumptuous hopes. I have no secrets hidden from them, and as I have often told them of faults and follies, of which, doubtless, I ought to have been ashamed, I could not delay the acknowledgment of a sentiment which must

ever be the pride as well as the happiness of my life. But why, oh ! why are you alone ?”

To this anxious question Mrs. Knight replied by giving a very touching description of the strong affection which bound together the hearts of Amelia Thorwold, and her fair but fading friend. If Alfred had required any additional charm to captivate his heart, he might have found it in the touching description given by Mrs. Knight of the devotion of Amelia to this lovely friend. “At such a moment too!” said she, “when prospects of a happy life of mutual affection seem opening before her. To tear herself away at such a moment is what very few young creatures would have courage to do. But Amelia Thorwold is a noble being !”

The lover and the friend, having indulged themselves for a few moments longer in exchanging exclamations of admiration and affection for the divine Amelia, entered the house together, arm in arm, and with an air of such very confidential good understanding, that Julia, who was passing through the hall at the moment, felt aware, at the very first

glance she gave them, that every thing was explained, acknowledged, and settled between them.

Mrs. Knight permitted her horses to be put up, confessing that she came pre-determined to take luncheon with them; and adding, in a little whisper audible to every body, "That when that necessary business should be over, she had just five words that she wanted to say to Colonel and Mrs. Dermont, by themselves." In order to give these five important words the more solemnity, Colonel Dermont led the way to his library, and the confidential trio continued to be shut up there till Mrs. Knight had managed to learn the exact amount of Colonel Dermont's income, the noble allowance of above one-half of it which he intended immediately to settle on his son, the liberal settlement of five hundred a year pin-money, and fifteen hundred a year jointure, which he proposed to make on Miss Thorwold, and finally, the proffer which he and Mrs. Dermont intended to make the young couple, of giving up the Mount to them as a residence,

if they wished it. In short, it was impossible that, save by the performance of the marriage ceremony, the match between Alfred Dermont and Miss Thorwold could be more completely settled and arranged, than it was before Mrs. Knight took her leave.

While this interesting conversation was going on in the library, Julia and Alfred remained tête-à-tête in the dining-room. She had made a movement to leave it as soon as she thought the retreating party had passed through the hall, but Alfred had stopped her.

“Oh, Julia! do not go! Cease to be so cruelly unkind to me!” he said. “At this happy, happy moment, the happiest perhaps that I have ever known, do not let me see your eyes turned from me with unkindness. I know I have been angry with you, Julia, very angry, for you were harsh to my idolised Amelia; and as long as I remained tortured by doubt, I was in no humour to make it up with you. But now that I have at last received the blessed confirmation of all my fondest hopes, I can no longer bear that my

dear play-fellow, my dear adopted sister, should look upon me coldly. Forgive me, dearest Julia! Forgive us both if we have misconstrued your manner. My sweet Amelia was wounded, because, of course, she wished you to love her, and she could not but feel that if you did love her, you would not have passed so severe a judgment on her surely pardonable thoughtlessness, in continuing to play at that foolish game so long with me. But look at me as you used to do, Julia, or I shall scarcely be able to feel quite happy, even though I have just been told, on such excellent authority, that Amelia loves me."

Julia, for a moment, closed her eyes, and felt in her heart a wish, most terribly sincere, that she might never open them again. There was something in the words and manner of Alfred so different from any thing she had ever perceived before—the heedless, reckless tone of the spoilt boy was so completely gone, and a softness so new, so touching, and, all things considered (or rather all things felt), so terrible, that to bear it

all with proper steadiness and composure seemed totally beyond her power.

But there is no feeling in an unspoiled female heart more powerful than the instinctive delicacy which makes her dread, like death, the betrayal of a love that has never been sought. At that moment, death would most certainly have been welcomed as a blessing by Julia—but it was not at her command. She had to live, to open her eyes again, to look in the face of Alfred, to know that he was looking at her expressly to find out what was passing in her heart, and then she had to speak, and in such a manner as to convince him that she loved him like a sister, and a very happy one, of course, seeing that he was so superlatively happy.

Could she do all this? Was it possible? No, it was not. Women are often accused, and often with justice, of being artful; but nobody seems to remember, when this is predicated of them as a fault, that, were it otherwise, they must often be guilty of another fault, which would generally be

considered as more odious still. For what woman ever did betray love for a man who had not first betrayed that he loved her, without making herself justly liable to that most painful of all accusations, a want of delicacy? Poor souls! How may they safely steer their course between the two? When one sees a thoughtless, heedless, giddy young creature, who in all else wears her heart upon her sleeve, when we see such a one deluding the lynx-like eye of vanity itself, and maintaining an aspect of cold indifference beside the man she loves, is it fair to scorn her for being artful? All that poor Julia had to save her now, was making a desperate effort to be artful—and she did make it, and with such success, that she had the comfort, the great, the immense, the unspeakable comfort of seeing Alfred look at her without having the slightest trace upon his features of guessing what was passing at her heart. “Dear Alfred!” she said, “if you fancy that I have either looked or spoke as if I were cross, you must forgive me, —you must indeed; for who ever looked

or spoke otherwise, when suffering as I have done, from toothache? I do wish you all happiness, my dearest Alfred; but if you know how dreadfully painful it was to me to speak at all, I am quite sure you would take it for granted, as you ought to do, and not wish me to talk about it."

Julia not only said all this, but she said it with such *consummate art*, that Alfred had not the least doubt but that she was, and had been, suffering dreadfully from toothache. Was Julia less loveable, or more so, for thus suddenly becoming an adept in this most reprobated feminine accomplishment?

CHAPTER X.

CONSIDERING that Miss Thorwold had never before travelled without attendance, she suffered wonderfully little inconvenience in transferring herself from Crosby to Mrs. Stedworth's house in Half-Moon-street, Piccadilly. Miss Thorwold had, for many years, been an excellent customer to Mrs. Stedworth, as well as a very amiable young lady, who had condescended to be extremely familiar with her, and to value her education and her talents as they deserved, without suffering her buying and selling position in society to interfere with their friendships.

All this was very fortunate at the present

moment. Nothing could be better than the manner of her reception; as far as it was in the power of Mrs. Stedworth to render it agreeable, it was so; for she had a great deal of that sort of quick perception which leads to the discovery of what is passing in the minds of the persons to whom she addressed herself, and also, of that judicious pliancy of manner which knows how to apply looks, words, and deeds, to suit it. There is but one word that can describe this peculiar species of talent, and that word is not *yet* quite English. *Tact* was the peculiar gift bestowed by the joint favours of nature and of art upon Mrs. Stedworth, and it was by means of this that she had been able, in more instances than one, to bring some of her proudest customers to treat her rather as a favoured friend and counsellor, than as a dealer in second-hand finery.

As it was evident, let the affair terminate as it would, that Miss Thorwold was at the present moment doing what was exceedingly wrong and imprudent, Mrs. Stedworth's manner had much more of obse-

quious respect than usual. It was exactly one of those occasions on which we sometimes see art mimicking nature, very cleverly, perhaps, but so as to make one feel the difference too, unless, as in the case of Miss Thorwold, particular feelings render the cheat too agreeable to be challenged.

If a kind, honest-hearted humble friend, on seeing an elegant young lady appear before, her suddenly deprived of all the appendages of her rank and station, had wished to soothe her feelings, it would probably have produced an increase of tender kindness, both in feeling and manner; but Mrs. Stedworth felt more for the bruised pride of her guest, than for any of her other sensations, and she assumed, accordingly, an air of such profound respect, that Amelia felt herself relieved at once from the only disagreeable emotion which her bold adventure had yet brought with it. More than once, as she approached the dwelling of her low-conditioned friend, her cheeks had tingled, and her heart had sunk, as she anticipated an

increase of familiarity which she felt would at the present moment be revolting to her.

But she did not do Mrs. Stedworth justice; she did not give her credit for the nicety of *tact* which taught her now, as it had often done before, that in order to be rendered as profitable as possible, a young lady of fashion must be handled gently, let her appear under whatever masquerading garb of humility she may. The profound courtesy with which she received her at the bottom of the stairs, as if she had been standing there in waiting for the honour of her approach, the extreme modesty with which she received the young lady's extended hand, looking as if she thought it too great a liberty to touch it, immediately suggested to Amelia the agreeable idea that "the dear good soul" was so occupied by thinking of her coming dignity as Lady William Hammond, and sister-in-law of the exquisitely elegant Duchess of Watertown, as to make her quite forget the easy terms they used to be upon.

She was kindly determined, however, to put her at her ease, if possible, because there really was too much to be done to afford the wasting any time in ceremony. But never, even under her present anxious circumstances, would Amelia have conversed with Mrs. Stedworth on the subject of her approaching marriage with so much freedom, had that judicious person *not* received her in the manner she did. Notwithstanding all the powerful motives, and demi-powerful motives, which were working in the brain of Miss Thorwold, like the foaming waters of converging cataracts, she would never have made any effort to relieve her mind by suffering the conflicting thoughts to escape her, had it not appeared so very evident that Mrs. Stedworth had sufficient good sense to perceive that the rank of Lord William more than compensated in every worldly view, not only for the loss of the young squire of the Mount, but also for the seeming imprudence of her present enterprise. This was exactly the right way in which to look at the whole affair, and showed so much expe-

rience and knowledge of the world, that Amelia felt the greatest confidence in her judgment in consequence of it, and joyfully determined to avail herself of her advice and assistance throughout the whole affair.

It is scarcely necessary to say that Lord William made his appearance in Half Moon-street just at the moment that his lovely Amelia was ready to receive him; but even while offering his enraptured thanks for the generous step she had taken, his anxiety for concealment caused him to ask her if she did not think she had run unnecessary risk by leaving Mrs. Knight so soon, observing that he could have arranged every thing without her coming, so as to have secured the performance of the marriage ceremony immediately upon her arrival. But she perfectly exonerated herself from every suspicion of imprudence by stating that the letter which had really arrived from her friend Miss Louisa Marchmont, the sister of the beautiful invalid, had most happily suggested such a motive for her leaving Crosby and England, as must not only excuse the suddenness

of her departure, but secure her from being followed by any troublesome inquiries. For not only was it true that the letter was written only the day before the departure of the Marchmont family for the continent, but that they left England so undecided as to the ultimate point of their destination as to make it impossible for some time to make any inquiries available. This, as of course it ought to do, perfectly satisfied Lord William, and the animation and eagerness with which she explained it all, made her look so magnificently beautiful, that her noble adorer declared, and perhaps truly, that not even at the famous ball at Almack's, where he had first beheld her, had she looked one thousandth part so divinely lovely as she did at that moment.

It was really a great relief to Miss Thorwold to find that her explanation on this point proved so completely satisfactory, for she had no inclination to mention to Lord William that she had herself a secondary motive for her abrupt departure, namely, her very earnest wish to avoid, if possible,

any further explanation with Alfred. Matters had advanced so far between them, that had they met again, a point blank proposal of marriage from the young gentleman must have been inevitable, which point-blank proposal would have required a point-blank answer, and this, at the time of her leaving Crosby, she had no inclination to give. For Miss Thorwold, blooming as she still was, had seen a good deal of the world, and was by no means ignorant of the instability in love affairs which is occasionally apparent in men of high fashion, as well as in meaner mortals ; it, therefore, *had* occurred to her that she should be scarcely doing justice to herself did she definitively refuse an offer of marriage so eligible as that of Alfred Dermont, before she felt quite sure of becoming definitively the wife of some one she liked better.

It was this feeling quite as much as the convenient coincidence of Miss Marchmont's illness, which had induced her to arrange her little quarrel with Mrs. Knight, and to make her escape under cover of it.

It was, therefore, naturally a great comfort for her to find that a good deal less than half the truth sufficed to satisfy her lover as to the motives of her prompt arrival; and greater still, beyond all doubt, was the satisfaction with which she perceived that the other half was likely to prove altogether unnecessary. For, so far from there appearing to be any thing at all approaching to vacillation of purpose in Lord William, his love was evidently increased, rather than diminished by the near prospect of calling the universally-admired Amelia his own.

It was, to be sure, a singular sort of life she led between the impassioned raptures of her *haut ton* lover, and the obsequious devotion of her humble friend. The pretty drawing-room of Mrs. Stedworth was, of course, devoted wholly to Amelia's use, but, nevertheless, there were few hours during which Mrs. Stedworth did not occupy it with her, save those in which Lord William himself was her companion.

The same judicious tone and manner which had, in the first instance, sufficed to

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remove the awkward sensations of Miss Thorwold, when presenting herself under such novel circumstances to her prudent hostess, continued to render their intercourse exceedingly soothing and agreeable to the young lady, and she, in return, so frankly indulged herself in unreserved communication with Mrs. Stedworth, as to render their long conversations almost equally agreeable to both.

It was impossible that this could continue through many hours of every day without its becoming evident to the acute capacity of the second-hand dress dealer, that although Amelia was as really in love with Lord William as it was possible she could be with any one, she nevertheless had not come to London without the comfortable assurance of having, according to Mrs. Stedworth's expressive phrase, "two strings to her bow." In short, Mrs. Stedworth very plainly perceived that, when the young lady first arrived, she was not without some lingering doubts of her noble lover's faith; but she saw also that these doubts were gradually wearing away,

and that she every day spoke with greater confidence of the happy and brilliant future which was opening before her as the wife of one of the most admired noblemen in England.

Mrs. Stedworth was exceedingly pleased that it should be so, and was by no means without personal hopes of her own, arising from the projected marriage, for she knew the Watertown family sufficiently well by reputation to think it possible, that by means of a good introduction she might hope for some profitable dealings with her grace.

But, notwithstanding this pleasant and promising view of the business, it occurred to Mrs. Stedworth, that it might be exceedingly well worth her while to keep rather an attentive eye on the proceedings of his lordship. For she really did know a good deal about men of fashion, as well as women of fashion, and as she was pretty certain that her dear Miss Thorwold had not five hundred pounds in the world, she could not help thinking that there might just be a possibility of some false dealing in the business, a conjecture which could

scarcely be considered as unreasonable, considering the very evident pains taken to keep the matter secret.

Amongst the other particulars which Amelia, without scruple, confided to her, the name of the parish church in which they were to be married, and in which the banns were being asked, was freely disclosed, accompanied, indeed, with an intimation that her personal attendance would be required at the wedding.

This intimation was answered in the most amiable manner possible, by an assurance that there was nothing she could do to assist so charming a young lady, which she was not ready to perform. But Mrs. Stedworth did not think it necessary to add that she was ready to do more than she was asked, and therefore Amelia, for the time being, was left ignorant of the fact, that her anxious hostess actually took the trouble of leaving the fashionable quarter of the town in which she and her best bonnet usually performed their devotions, in order to visit this vastly inelegant suburban church, for the purpose of ascertaining

whether the banns were really published there or not. The result of this friendly anxiety need not be entered into at present; nor is it necessary to follow any further the monotonous life led by Miss Thorwold during the ensuing fortnight. It is sufficient to state that Mrs. Stedworth very faithfully stood beside her while a gentleman clothed in a very dirty surplice performed the marriage ceremony. A person brought to the church by Lord William had the honour of giving the bride away; but he was unknown to her, and when she afterwards asked her noble bridegroom the name of his shy-looking friend, he only replied: "You don't know him, my love, but he is an excellent fellow, and greatly attached to me; his name is Morrison."

Neither can we follow the happy pair on their happy bridal tour to a very romantic and retired village in Gloucestershire, where it happened that the widowed mistress of the pretty rustic inn where they lodged, was also called Morrison. Though neither very elegant nor very costly, their entertain-

ment at this rustic inn was scrupulously neat, and by no means uncomfortable, and, as the weather was fine, the surrounding country very beautiful, and both bride and bridegroom exceedingly in love, the strange novelty of every thing around them only seemed to add to their felicity; and, excepting these novelties, there was little to distinguish their honeymoon from that of many others, save that it lasted only a fortnight. But Lady William had the satisfaction of knowing, as certainly as the assurance of Lord William could make her, that the curtailment of this favourite period of human life was not a matter of choice, but of necessity.

“My angel!” he exclaimed, as they sat together over their twelfth breakfast, counting from the day of their arrival at the little inn—“My angel!” he exclaimed, presenting her with a twelfth nosegay of moss-rose buds gathered from the garden of the said little inn, “how utterly impossible it will ever be for me to believe that it has ever fallen to the lot of any other man to be as supremely blessed as I have been during the fleeting

hours which have flown over our heads since I obtained the ecstatic privilege of calling you mine. But, alas ! my love, how lamentably swift do such moments vanish—the fairest, still the fleetest ! Could you believe, my Amelia, that we have already been married a fortnight ?”

“The time has indeed flown swiftly, my dear lord,” replied her ladyship; “but the hours have been too precious for me not to count them. I know quite well, Lord William, that we have indeed been married a whole fortnight.”

“I heartily wish that I could forget it, my sweet love,” said he, tenderly kissing the beautiful hand which presented his coffee. “But it seems that you keep too accurately a note of time, to permit my indulging myself in any such dear delusion; and therefore, Amelia, I am obliged to remember, and alas ! you must remember too, my love, that it is absolutely necessary we should return immediately to town, in order to ascertain whether Watertown has redeemed his promise by paying my terribly alarming debts;

for till I have this assurance, I can only, as you already know but too well, creep about like an escaped felon by owl's light."

"But you have no doubt, my love, about his having kept his promise, have you?" said Lady William Hammond, while a slight shade of anxiety flitted across her ivory brow.

"It were a sin, dearest," replied his lordship, gaily, "to doubt the pledged word of a noble duke; but nevertheless it behoves me as a man of business, and, moreover, the bridegroom of the loveliest woman in existence, that I should ascertain the fact without delay. It would be rather an awkward thing, most beautiful Amelia, were there to be any mistake about it."

For a single moment there was on the countenance of his lordship a queer sort of melo-dramatic vehemence of gloomy expression, which, if it had lasted, might perhaps rather have alarmed his bride, though she was by no means a nervous person; but as it was immediately followed by a gay smile, and the careful preparation of a new-laid

egg for her use and service, 'she did not much mind it, and only asked him, as she eat the said egg, whether he did not think his grace of Watertown would be a good deal disappointed when he discovered that he had paid the money for nothing—that is to say, without his having obtained the wealthy sister-in-law he coveted.

“Upon my word, dear love, I have not given myself the trouble of considering whether he will or not. All I have considered is, that I am as much the lawful son of the late duke as he, and that if he suffers me to be marched to gaol, he will be disgraced for life. This is the only rational light in which to view the transaction between us. And as to his daring seriously to resent my choosing to have a will of my own, in choosing a wife, I will not suppose it possible.”

The breakfast was then finished, as all their former breakfasts had been, with a gay proposal of a ramble through the hay-fields by the side of the river; but pleasant as this was, the sun had not set before they had

left the white-washed inn of Mrs. Morrison far behind them, and were scudding away at a great pace, and perfectly incog., upon a railroad which was to bring them into London at a safely early hour on the following morning.

CHAPTER XI.

POOR Julia, meanwhile, was enjoying as much happiness as ever seemed likely to fall to her lot, from the perfect reconciliation which had taken place between herself and Alfred ; and this happiness was neither solitary nor selfish, for Alfred appeared to share in it with almost equal pleasure. Nay, as far as the comfort of finding himself again on good terms with Julia went, it was certainly quite as keenly felt by him as by her, the real difference between their feelings arising from his suffering as much pain from the absence of Amelia, as Julia felt relief from it.

But at this time the sentiments of Julia for

her early friend had undergone a change as meritorious, as it was salutary. It was not that she loved him a whit less than before the bright meteor had passed over them, the blaze of which had seemed to show her the state of her heart, at the same moment that it crushed it for ever. No; her affection was equally firm, equally devoted, equally self-forgetting and entire; but it was now no longer the fluttering, fitful hope and fear-tinted love of a young girl, who is gay one minute, and pensive the next, she knows not why. All such rainbow sort of folly was quite over for Julia. She knew all about it now, all about Alfred, all about herself, and (which was by far the worst part of it) all about Amelia too.

ALL about Amelia? No, not quite all; for she did not know any thing whatever about Lord William Hammond, she had never seen him, nor ever heard his noble name mentioned. Had it been otherwise, had his lordship not taken himself off before the archery meeting at Crosby, matters might have gone very differently; for Julia was

more jealously watchful for Alfred, than Alfred was for himself, and it would have hardly been possible for such a day to have passed, without showing something more of the beautiful Amelia to Julia, than all which had gone before it had enabled her to discover.

Up to a certain point, Julia could have forced herself, and had forced herself, to endure the seeing much that she disliked, without betraying her observations to Alfred. Had she not become conscious that she loved Alfred, even as he himself loved Amelia, she would not thus have acted. But she shrunk with absolute terror from the idea of first judging her hastily, only, perhaps, because she was beloved by Alfred, and then interfering to separate them, when, perhaps, despite their mutual faults, their mutual love might make them happy. For Julia knew that Alfred had faults, but she knew also how well he could be loved in spite of them, and how, therefore, could she venture to judge the faults of Amelia more severely? What right had she to suppose that Alfred's

love was not of the same forgiving nature as her own?

So, up to a certain point Julia would have kept all her observations to herself, and Alfred would have derived no benefit from the keener perceptions of his friend. But beyond that point most surely she would not have gone. Neither the pride of maiden delicacy, nor the conscientious integrity of her self-doubting spirit, would have led her to look on in silence had she seen reason to believe that Miss Thorwold, while intending to become the wife of Alfred, secretly preferred another man.

But no such wildly improbable idea had ever crossed her innocent head, and the only office that her strictly guarded love was now permitted to perform, consisted in listening for long hours to the rhapsodies of Alfred's love for another. And this she did with such gentle martyr-like endurance, that there were moments in which she almost forgave herself for the sin of having loved too well, from an honest consciousness that the penance she endured was sufficient to atone for it.

In this manner, days and weeks passed on, greatly, of course, to the annoyance of the enamoured young man, but without suggesting either to himself or his parents any shadow of doubt concerning the ultimate success of his passion. Lord Ripley really owed a considerable debt of gratitude to the friendly exertions of Mrs. Knight, for it was for his sake alone that she continued to make the prolonged absence of Amelia appear to the Dermont family only as an additional reason for loving her. Her exemplary kindness in attending the sick-bed of her young friend, was again and again pointed out, and applauded to the echo, while of her continued silence towards herself she said not a word.

No suspicion whatever of the truth had indeed ever suggested itself to Mrs. Knight. She fancied that she knew Amelia thoroughly, and felt persuaded that had Lord William uttered a single word approaching to serious love-making, her triumphant joy at it would have been far too great to conceal. She therefore doubted not that the troublesome

beauty still intended to bestow herself upon Alfred Dermont, and concluded that, having been really invited by the afflicted family of Caroline Marchmont to accompany them abroad, she had accepted the proposal, notwithstanding the melancholy circumstances attending it, in order to escape the mortification of again owning herself disappointed in her hopes respecting Lord William.

As to her silence towards herself, there was nothing very surprising in that. She had quarrelled with her in a fit of ill-humour, doubtless occasioned by her disappointment at Lord William's sudden departure, nor did she expect to hear from her again, till such time as she should be ready to return to her accustomed apartment at Crosby.

Meanwhile, the little affairs of the neighbourhood did not stand still, but, on the contrary, an event of great importance had occurred at Overby, which occasioned as vehement emotions in the hearts of the young ladies of that town, as the departure of Miss Thorwold in that of Alfred. The military

had been ordered off! And though, from the still unsettled state of the country, another detachment was expected to arrive, the lamentations were very general; nay, even the arrival of this new detachment was an event which, for a long time, remained problematical, and during this interval the state of the little town was indeed melancholy. Of all the young ladies who had taken a lively interest in the departed squadron, Miss Celestina Marsh was the only one who listened, for the last time, to their drums and fifes, as they were borne to her by the breeze across one or two enclosures which divided the high road from Beech Grove (for at Beech Grove she was staying at the time), Miss Celestina Marsh was the only one of them all who listened to those sad parting notes with composure.

But she felt, with the wounded pride of an unfortunate and too susceptible young lady, that she had nothing to regret. The conduct of Captain Waters had been, if possible, more atrociously, more basely false, than even that of Ensign Wheeler; and

nothing but the sympathising friendship of Mrs. Stephens could have enabled her to bear it as she had done.

To her brother, also, the departure of these two unworthy gentlemen was a great relief, for excepting during the happy, and now pretty frequent, intervals during which Celestina was from home, his life had been made unspeakably wretched by the alternate hot and cold fits of his sister's fever, which at one time led her to implore him, sometimes upon her bended knees, and at others in the accents of a commanding termagant, to invite either the one or the other of them to the house, and at another to threaten him with the mingled scorn and abhorrence of the whole neighbourhood, if he did not rouse his courage sufficiently to insist upon their explaining the cause of their most unprincipled conduct.

It is not possible, in the short space which is all that can be allowed to this portion of Miss Celestina's history, to do any thing like justice to the unequalled gentleness of her high-minded but pitying brother. Per-

haps the idea of her suffering from hopeless love would not have touched his heart so deeply, had he not known so well how great was the misery it brought. Neither could the alteration of Waters for Wheeler, and Wheeler for Waters, enlighten him, as it would have done most others upon the nature of the sentiment so hopelessly suffered by his unfortunate sister ; for never conceiving it possible that she would have been just as well pleased to have one at her feet as the other, he imagined that the one he had just heard her talk about was the ungrateful and too fondly loved master of her destiny, and that her subsequent wish to obtain the society of the other either arose from the desperate hope that his conversation might indeed assist her to forget the traitor who had robbed her of her peace, or from another hope, probably more desperate still, that a feeling of jealousy, on hearing that another was paying her attention, might bring back the fickle ensign to his allegiance.

The secret conviction of his own heart,

that neither the one nor the other ever had the very least propensity to fall in love with his unfortunate sister, did not at all lessen his pity, but, on the contrary, rather increased it; for was it not an additional proof of the melancholy fact that no man was likely to love her? In truth, it was his early conviction of this melancholy fact, which had first created in his heart that profound emotion of compassion which had led to the indulgent kindness she so unworthily abused. All this may appear very far-fetched and ridiculous to those who have never witnessed the operation of a sentiment so true in its effect, yet so absurdly false as to its cause. But such things are.

Great indeed was the satisfaction of George, on hearing that this dangerous body of men were on their march, and his satisfaction was still further increased by the unexpected courage with which his sister bore it. He would have felt less assured of his promised peace for the future, perhaps, had he been aware that this courageous resignation to necessity arose from a

speech of Mrs. Stephens's uttering. "I wish you joy, my beloved Celestina; "said she, on hearing of the movement which was to take away the false-hearted wretches, whose unprincipled conduct had been so often dwelt upon by her friend; "I wish you joy with all my heart! Thank Heaven! we are sure of having more military, for it was but yesterday I heard of a dozen more frames being broke; and if we do get another set, my dear girl, it will be hard indeed if it does not turn out better for you."

At Overby itself, the scenes which followed the announcement of this terrible news were truly melancholy. Not but what Cupid's bolt had really fallen with sure aim and quite sufficient force in one direction, for, like as when a flight of wild fowl journeying on the wing, and feeling themselves above the reach of ordinary shots, dream not of danger, one among them gets a chance hit, and falls at the feet of the fowler, so fell young Ensign Wheeler by the shaft shot from the gentle eyes of Miss Louisa

Morris; but, excepting in this solitary instance, the troops sent to this pretty little town, under the command of Major Sommerton, left it again very tolerably heart whole. But not the less for that did many a pretty young lady "peak and pine" at their departure; nor was there one among them who did not in her heart believe that if they had been suffered to remain there only a very little longer, the work, in very many instances so auspiciously begun, would have been happily completed.

The first gleam of hope which followed all this woe was brought by Miss Kersley, who, thanks to the general information professionally obtained by her uncle, the apothecary, entered the Miss Murrays' sleeping apartment, where the two pretty sisters were lovingly weeping together, seated side by side upon the bed, with the stirring intelligence that two more troops had been ordered down, and were expected to march into the town immediately. The lively Miss Kattie Murray received the news in the same happy

spirit in which it was given, and, dashing the tears from her eyes, exclaimed, "Heaven be praised for that, Mary!"

But her more pensive sister, though it may be that the gushing tear-drops ceased to flow, by no means recovered her spirits so quickly, for after several moments of very earnestly grave meditation, she replied, "Ah, Mary! and if your news be true it may not be doubted but we might have had worse. But oh! my dear! we have got it all to begin over again!"

* * * * *

This military movement was the most important public event which befel the town of Overby and its neighbourhood during the first six weeks after the departure of Miss Thorwold from Crosby, and although it arrived amidst gloom and sadness, the darkness that at first seemed to result from it speedily dispersed, and a considerable degree of unexpected brilliance was the consequence. The principal cause of this probably was that the regiment of which this new detachment made a part, being a favourite one with the

aristocracy of England, no less than three noble scions of right noble houses were among the officers now sent to keep the working men of the district in order, and to scatter confusion among the hearts of its idle ladies.

As to the effect which they produced upon the town beauties I can say but little, my historical researches having for the time been directed elsewhere. Perhaps they created more of vanity and less of love, and where they condescended to smile, it may be that less of future hope, and more of present triumph was felt than before. The sensation they occasioned, however, was altogether exceedingly great. Little Louisa Morris indeed would not have given a penny a dozen for them, had they been put up to sale. But her case was, as we know, exceptional.

It was among the class of persons designated as "*the county families*" (a class now alas ! but thinly scattered) that these gentlemen produced the most effect ; a series of dinner parties immediately began, which, as the three honourables were sociable and

pleasant in their bearing, soon led to better acquaintance.

Mrs. Knight in particular declared that it quite did her good to get hold of somebody who knew something about the rest of the world. Mrs. Verepoint had the gratification of finding in one of these honourable men the son of her most intimate friend, and Colonel Dermont was startled by being informed with all befitting forms and ceremonies, within two months after their arrival, that the Honourable Mr. Borrowdale, by far the most distinguished individual of the trio, had no wish so near his heart as that of being permitted to lay himself, and his very handsome younger brother's fortune, at the feet of his little ward Julia.

This was a proposal so every way advantageous, that, of course, the worthy colonel could not fail of being extremely pleased by it; but, nevertheless, it is certain that his first and most powerful sensation, on receiving Mr. Borrowdale's letter, was surprise. Julia had hitherto been considered so completely as a child by them all, that the notion

of her being *married* was really laughable ; but, of course, he knew better than to treat such an offer lightly, and when he communicated the matter to his wife, it was done with a great deal of guardian-like dignity.

This did not, however, prevent Mrs. Dermont from exclaiming, " What can you mean by talking such nonsense, colonel? What joke have you got in your head now?" Nor could his very gravest remonstrance upon the impropriety of her treating the subject in so unsuitable a manner, prevent her from declaring, that though, of course, she was very glad of it, she could not help thinking it the most ridiculous thing she had ever heard in her life.

That the reader may not entirely agree with her in this, it may be as well to inform him that, whatever the Colonel and Mrs. Dermont might think of Julia, and her childishness, nobody now seeing her for the first time would have been likely to think there was any thing childish in her at all.

In the first place, she had been growing very rapidly during the last year and a half,

and although till very lately this additional height had not increased either her beauty or her air of womanhood, it was now doing both. A few days of sickly paleness, and a few days of heavy-looking eyes, had been the consequence of the twofold and doubly sad discovery of Alfred's love for Miss Thorwold, and her own love for him. But at seventeen minus a month or two, it is only upon weak or wilful spirits that such sorrows press with a weight sufficiently heavy to counteract the buoyant tendency of nature, and actually to crush and wither what has so strong a principle of hopeful life in it. And, of all others, the nature of Julia was the last to sink and perish under selfish sorrow. The struggle in her young heart, produced as it was by a multitude of pure and virtuous feelings, was morally healthy, though intensely painful, and it brought with wonderful rapidity a new-born expression to her features, which others, besides the heart-struck Mr. Borrowdale, might have found very lovely. In truth, had Julia Drummond lived to the age of a hundred without hav-

ing had her heart awakened, and her intellect and principles brought into action, she might have remained during the whole period more like a child, that is to say, less fully developed, than she was now. Her natural complexion was still pale, and of a species of carnation which, during childhood, generally falls under the disparaging epithet of sallow. And this is a defect which renders the ugliness of many a little creature hopeless, excepting to the prophetic eye of experience. So, on the other hand, there is no possible beauty of childish features which can produce an effect so strikingly beautiful as that given by a fine complexion. Put on a female child, with pink and white colouring on its soft round cheeks, and showing the bright light hair that belongs to it, a lace cap with pretty pale-coloured ribbons, and the beauty of the little miniature woman has something perfectly angelic in it.

Had any such experiment been made on Julia, the exclamation produced would most probably have been, "How frightful!" But now her turn was come; and few, indeed,

are the vermillion-tintured cheeks which might venture to compare in beauty with the pale loveliness of those of Julia.

It is exactly such a face as hers which profits most by being made the index of every thought that arises in the heart. There are many faces by no means deficient in expression, which, though they may gain in interest by the sort of gossiping record they bear of what is passing within, lose in beauty from the want of repose, which ought, in every fair face, to be alternate with mobility of feeling, in order that the charm of both states may be fully felt.

But in Julia this very repose was elegant, and never, excepting during moments when every human eye is shunned, did emotion destroy the exquisite harmony of her features, although all who looked in her face must be dull indeed, if they could not see both thought and feeling there.

Yet, such as I describe her, such as she was, Alfred Dermont was scarcely more aware that she was beautiful, than were his unobservant father and mother. Once only,

during the early part of the fête at the Mount, had his observation been sufficiently roused to notice her appearance ; but though he did notice it, and really felt both surprised and pleased that the dear little girl showed symptoms of being likely some day to add beauty to all the good and endearing qualities she already possessed, though he did notice this for a moment, he soon forgot it again completely, amidst the vehement emotions produced by his passionate admiration for Amelia.

The finished womanhood of Miss Thorwold completely threw into the shade the girlish, unobtrusive graces of Julia ; and her considerable juniorship to himself also, which at his age appears so greatly more important than it does afterwards, completed the *sort* of delusion which prevented his having ever seen her as she really was.

On hearing, therefore, which he immediately did from his father, of Mr. Borrowdale's proposal, his surprise was fully as great as that of his parents ; but his satisfaction from it decidedly less. The heart of man is

a queerly complicated machine, and to follow it through all its various movements is well nigh impossible. Alfred really was an extremely fine young man, both in body and soul; but we know that he had been badly educated, and that the devotion and obedience shown to his whims and his will had greatly disposed him to believe that the whole world and all the things in it were made for him.

If this will not suffice to account for the extremely disagreeable sensations with which he heard of Mr. Borrowdale's proposal, it must rest in mystery and darkness, for I have no clearer explanation to offer. Certain it is, however, that his sensations *were* disagreeable, and the contraction of his brow thereupon so evident, that the colonel, though a good deal pre-occupied, observed it.

"Why, Alfred, don't you think it is a capital good match for her?" said the old gentleman, looking at his son with an air of puzzled surprise.

"Upon my word, sir, I know nothing at all about it," he replied "The young man

is so completely a stranger to us all, that it seems to me quite impossible we should be any of us capable of forming an opinion of him. And Julia herself, whom of course it most nearly concerns, is still so completely a child as to render the asking her to form any serious judgment on the subject an absolute farce."

"Why, to be sure, Julia is rather young, Alfred. Perhaps she is too young to make it right for her to marry yet? But it is a capital good connexion, you know, and I don't feel as if I should be doing right to refuse it just because Julia happens to be very young-looking; for there is many a girl that marries at seventeen, you know, and I won't let her marry till after her birth-day, because she will be then of age, which will make all the settlement work so much more straightforward and simple. And I don't think the dear child will be in any such hurry herself, as to make her wish to bring it to a conclusion before."

"Then Julia has accepted him, sir?" said Alfred.

"Why, I look upon it as a matter of course that she will accept him," returned the colonel, smiling. "Borrowdale is by far the handsomest young man, I take it, that she has ever seen, except yourself, Alfred, and you count for nothing, you know, as the poor child, even if she were years older, could never have looked upon you in any other light than as a brother. I can't say," he continued, "that I think there is much danger of her refusing him. However, I have had no opportunity of asking her yet, for she was out walking when the note came, and she has not been in since."

"I dare say you are quite right, sir," said Alfred, in a tone that seemed to indicate a good deal of scorn for the whole race of young ladies (though, questionless, he made a mental reservation in favour of one), "and I should like to be present when you tell her of it."

"Then I will do it at once, for here she comes;" and the old gentleman opened the parlour door as he spoke, and placed himself

on the steps of the hall door to way-lay her as she entered.

“Come with me, my dear, for a moment, will you?” said he, holding out his hand to her—“I have something to say to you.”

It instantly occurred to Julia that tidings had arrived concerning the return of Miss Thorwold, and that she was now summoned for the purpose of being told when the nuptials of Alfred were to take place. She felt her heart beat rather more strongly than it ought to do; but a month ago it would have beat more strongly still, and, more pleased by her own composure than frightened at its not being greater, she obeyed without hesitation, and almost without reluctance. But she did not expect to see Alfred, and her colour went and came, and went again, as she anticipated hearing the expected intelligence in his presence.

Alfred watched these symptoms of emotion. “She guesses what is coming,” thought he, “so we shall not have the amusement of witnessing any surprise. It is lucky for Miss Julia that my Amelia was out of the way

when this marrying gentleman came among us. Had he seen her first, he would scarcely"—but the unfinished sentence hung suspended, as it were, in his mind, as he looked at her, and instead of finishing it he began another, which if uttered would have expressed an idea which certainly never entered his head before, namely that it might be possible, seeing there was such great variety of tastes in the world, that some men might think the face of Julia, just as she looked at that moment, as beautiful as that of Miss Thorwold herself.

"Julia," said the colonel, "I have news for you, that I think will surprise you a little, but which I hope will please you more. And I am quite sure it will, if you are the sensible young lady I take you for. Do you think you shall be able to bear a surprise, my dear, as a grown-up young woman ought to do? My news will put you, and all of us, into a bustle, I promise you."

"Well, sir! What is it?" said Julia, quietly, and once again, with *true* feminine

artifice, endeavouring to make her outward seeming as far unlike her real condition as possible.

"Why this it is, my dear child," replied her guardian, looking at her very affectionately. "I have to inform you that the Honourable Mr. Borrowdale aspires to the happiness of possessing your fair little hand in marriage, and that he proposes settlements which might satisfy the most covetous old guardian in the world."

"Is that all?" said Julia, greatly relieved; and thoughtless of the strange appearance which so much levity must have at such a serious moment, she mounted upon a footstool, which stood before the open sash-window, evidently in order to pass from thence to the window-sill, as was her frequent custom, when wishing for an impromptu run upon the lawn.

"No, Julia, it is not quite all," resumed the colonel, gravely, and evidently displeased at the careless, not to say saucy tone of the young lady's reply. "It is not all; for it is proper that I should tell you, though,

from delicacy, Mr. Borrowdale does not, that his elder brother, who had that dreadful fall from his horse in the park a year or two ago, is not expected to live. He has been in a very melancholy state ever since the accident, and now he is said to have fallen into a rapid decline. So you perceive that the wife of Mr. Borrowdale is pretty well certain of being one day or other Lady Middlehurst."

"The gentleman's declining state, sir, will not make any difference to me, I do assure you ; for I certainly shall never marry Mr. Borrowdale," replied Julia.

"And pray, why so, Miss Drummond?" demanded the colonel, in a very stern voice.

"Because I would rather not, sir," said Julia, in a manner pretty nearly as stern as his own; but then, repentant as it seemed, for this unusual harshness, she stepped back from the tempting open window into the room, and putting her hand on the old gentleman's shoulder, kissed his forehead.

"Do not let us talk any more about Mr. Borrowdale, my dear sir," said she, "for it

can be of no use, you know, as I do not at all want to be married to any body. I like living at the Mount better than any where else a thousand times over, and if you and dear Mrs. Dermont will only let me go on so, I shall never wish to go away. And I know you will be so kind as to write just exactly such a letter as ought to be written to Mr. Borrowdale. Will you, sir?"

This was said very coaxingly, but nevertheless, and notwithstanding the kiss which preceded it, the colonel did not recover his good-humour at all, but drawing away from the little hand which still rested on his shoulder, he replied, "The only sort of letter which, in my opinion, ought to be written to Mr. Borrowdale, is one which should inform him that his very flattering proposal is accepted. We all know that it is perfectly impossible so very young a lady as you are, Miss Julia, can have fallen in love with any body else; and therefore it is my duty as your guardian, to tell you, that so excellent an offer must not be rejected till you have given yourself time to think a little more at

leisure upon the subject. If I were this very moment to sit down and write such an answer as you have told me to do, I have little doubt that you would reproach me for it in your heart before this time to-morrow. Don't you think so, Alfred?"

"No, indeed, sir, I do not," replied the young man, eagerly; "and I must say that I shall think you very wrong, sir, if you refuse to write in the manner Miss Drummond desires. If she is old enough to accept an offer of marriage, she must also be old enough to refuse one; and I really cannot conceive that you can, in any way, be justified in refusing, or even in delaying, to forward Julia's answer to Mr. Borrowdale."

Tears, which Alfred felt very sure were tears of gratitude, started to poor Julia's eyes on hearing him thus take her part, and she gave him one look of thankfulness as she passed again towards the open window, which had more of truthfulness in it than any look she had bestowed upon him for the last three months or more.

"If that is really your opinion, Alfred,"

said the father, as soon as Julia had fairly made her escape through the window, "I certainly shall give up my own. But it does seem almost a pity, Alfred, to refuse such a very excellent offer. You certainly can't expect that she will ever get a better. With all my care, and I am sure I have not spared it, her fortune will be but a trifle beyond ten thousand pounds ; and that, even in these poor days, will not suffice to purchase a coronet. Neither must we, I suppose, reckon too much on her beauty, Alfred; for I don't believe that any body ever did think her pretty before. I can't say that I think her plain, myself; rather the contrary indeed, and especially of late, since she has shot up so. But that is no rule for others, and as I never did hear any body call her handsome, it is plain that she cannot be considered as a beauty ; and all this ought to be taken into consideration, you know, or I shall not be doing my duty as a guardian."

"I do not think, sir," returned Alfred, rather thoughtfully, "that Julia is ugly enough to be urged, on that account, to

marry any body she does not like." And it is certain that, at that moment, Alfred was thinking of the look she had given him as she passed towards the window.

"I don't mean to say she is ugly," returned the colonel, rather pettishly; "and you know well enough, Alfred, that I never do refuse to listen to your opinion,—but still, I do think it is a very great pity."

The refusal, however, was written, and there was an end of the affair; the young honourable immediately making use of his interest for obtaining leave of absence for a few months, with the well-founded hope that the quarters of the detachment would be changed before they were expired.

The hearts of young ladies and gentlemen are very often extremely difficult to be interpreted, and in the present instance, it would be any thing but easy to explain, satisfactorily, why it was that the little scene above related occasioned feelings so decidedly agreeable both to Alfred and Julia. Why did Julia feel glad that Alfred should know that Mr. Borrowdale had made her

an offer ? And why was Alfred put into a state of such amiable good-humour, because she had refused it ?

There was no mystery, however, in Julia's feeling very grateful to Alfred for his timely interference, as it certainly saved her a good deal of trouble ; for had Mrs. Dermont been consulted before the answer was despatched, she would not have been let off so easily. But she sighed the next day, poor girl, when she thought how speedily he was rewarded for his good-nature ; for not only did he hear news of his beautiful Amelia, but it reached him in what he must have felt to be the most flattering manner in the world.

CHAPTER XII.

THE railroad journey upon which Lord and Lady William Hammond had just set out when last we parted from them, brought them safely to the London station, and from thence a hackney-coach conveyed them with equal safety to the friendly Mrs. Stedworth's, in Half-Moon-street. The tender assiduities of Lord William in no degree relaxed; and if his beautiful bride received them with a little less of genuine rapture than at first, some allowance must be made for her on account of the disagreeable sensations naturally attending her return to town as Miss Thorwold, still hiding herself in a little lodging in Half-Moon-street, instead of coming to an osten-

sible home as the Lady William Hammond, sister-in-law to the Duke of Watertown.

There had certainly been, on both sides, a good deal of that species of haste, which in matrimonial affairs is considered as likely to lead to leisurely repentance; but, as yet, the gentleman appeared to feel it less than the lady. He still thought his Amelia one of the loveliest women he had ever seen, and as this was precisely the reason why he had suddenly come to the resolution that he would not let Alfred Dermont marry her, he had no excuse, as long as this opinion lasted, for being very greatly disappointed at the result of the party of pleasure upon which his impetuosity had led him to embark.

But Amelia, though she certainly did admire Lord William Hammond very much indeed, and was, after her fashion, very violently in love with him, admired LORD William Hammond so very much more, that the seemingly total eclipse of this portion of the individual upon whom she had bestowed herself, must naturally be supposed

to damp her rapturous feelings considerably.

Unfortunately, the beautiful Amelia was subject to what her obsequious friend, Mrs. Stedworth, called "low spirits," whenever things went contrary to her inclinations; but ruder lips might have given the state of her mind she thus described a different name, and have declared her to have a most tremendously sullen temper, which made itself both felt and seen, as soon as the fit fell upon her.

From the time of her return from the widow Morrison's cottage, to the end of the second week subsequently spent in Half-Moon-street, Amelia had, in truth, little or no reason to complain that his lordship had deceived her ; for if his condition were, in fact, worse than he had described it to her, she had not yet found it out, and it was therefore, not of *that* she could complain. Nevertheless, she did not at all scruple to let him see that she thought he was behaving extremely ill, in not letting her understand that he was approaching to the end of the

hateful incognito under which she was living.

Some ladies take one way of complaining and some another ; none of them, perhaps, render them very agreeable, but the tender and the plaintive,—particularly if the complaining lady happen to be very handsome, and has the good luck of being greatly admired by the gentleman complained to,—will be endured much longer than the sullen.

Had the beautiful Amelia been aware of this, she might certainly have managed better, but as it was, she not only ran the usual risk that complaining always brings with it, but made the fatal mistake of doing it in the most unbecoming manner possible.

It would not be saying at all too much, were I to declare that she looked positively plain when Lord William returned to Half-Moon-street to dinner on the thirty-second day after that on which he had saluted her beautiful lips as his bride. Her hair, to which she had been used to pay the very greatest attention, was on this unfortunate occasion, completely neglected ; and as it was

not her custom to wear it in the convenient fashion of bands, but in long ringlets of surpassing beauty, though not of natural curl, the absence of all care produced a very deplorable effect indeed. Perhaps the daring neglect of her rouge was more fatal still; for all lustre seemed to have faded from her eyes, and a heavy look of sullen discontent but ill supplied its place.

Had Amelia felt herself in the terrible position of those who have trusted their all to the faith and honour of a lover, she would have doubtless been more cautious; but as the continuing to keep her marriage secret was, in fact, the only thing she greatly feared, she determined to make his lordship feel that it was not her intention to let it remain so long, and that the character of the fond and lovely wife was not the only one she had the power to perform.

“He cannot unmarry me,” thought she, “let him think me as little like an angel as he will. And he may find out that it will be better policy to present a beautiful adoring young bride to the admiring world, than

such a one as I may have the power of showing him."

The first words uttered by his lordship upon entering the drawing-room and looking upon his greatly altered lady were, "THE DEVIL!"

There was so much of genuine astonishment in his look and manner, that Amelia determined to take advantage of it, and said, with brows knit, and every feature sunk, if I may use the phrase, in such a slough of ill-humour, as to make her look any thing in the world but lovely or loveable, "Your coming here to swear at me, my lord, will not go far towards persuading me that I am doing my duty towards myself and my noble relatives by remaining here, to all intents and purposes, in the honourable character of your lordship's mistress. Believe me *at once*, when I tell you that I have had enough of it. Has your brother paid your debts, my lord? You gave me to understand that it was in your power to make him do this, as soon as you returned to town. If this be done, I am willing to go abroad

with you, but it must be as your wife, sir, and not as your mistress. Nor do I doubt that my uncle will assist us in living decently abroad, till you obtain possession of your mother's fortune. Are your debts paid, Lord William?"

Lord William never took his eyes off her for a single instant while she was speaking, and when she ceased, he only replied by saying in a voice that betokened more coldness than passion of any kind, "What on earth have you been doing to yourself, Amelia? You look as ugly as Hecate, and forty years old at the very least. What does it all mean? Are you getting up a comedy for my amusement?"

"Far from it, my lord," she replied, "we certainly have been amusing ourselves with a comedy, but it is over. It might all do very well for a week or two, and might go on longer still had you married a pretty rustic. But you must be aware that for a woman of fashion I have had enough of it; and I must confess that I could not have expected your lordship to enact the senti-

mental so long. Has your brother paid your debts, my lord?"

"No, my lady, he has not," replied Lord William.

"Is he about to do it?" she rejoined.

Amelia had been acquainted with Lord William Hammond for considerably more than a year, which period included two long London seasons. For great part of that time they had met almost constantly every day, and sometimes oftener. For just when Miss Thorwold rode, Lord William was in the habit of riding also, not to mention a variety of other accidents which brought them occasionally together, so that the acquaintance ripened by degrees into considerable intimacy; and as it happened that they mutually admired each other with more than common admiration, it naturally followed that these perpetual meetings, and this constantly increasing intimacy led to a great deal of conversation between them.

Nevertheless it is a certain fact that Miss Thorwold knew no more of the real character of Lord William Hammond, at the time that

the marriage service was performed between them, than if she had never seen him. Neither did his lordship know very much of her; but the case was widely different between them. For, respecting her, he might, had he set himself seriously to the task, have easily known all that there was to know. The little fact of her being deeply in debt lay not, indeed, exactly on the surface, but even that might have been guessed at, from the very visible extravagance of her toilet, and her well-known dependence upon an uncle, by no means famous for his generosity. But as for all the rest, what was there to be known that he did not know? Whether she might be more sulky or more savage when out of temper, could only, of course, be learned by experience, and to say the truth, he cared very little about it. As long as she continued to charm him, he should remain near her; and when she ceased to do so, he should not. Such, whether to wife or mistress, would naturally be the result with every rational man, and he had no intention of regulating his own conduct upon any other prin-

ciple, so that, in truth, it was by no means worth his while to trouble himself respecting the peculiarities of her character. Comparatively speaking there was but little to be known, and concerning that little he cared not one single farthing.

But Amelia, in forming her estimate of him, had left out just every thing of sufficient importance to be deemed character at all. His rank placed him in the highest circles, his stature and good carriage made him conspicuous there; his waltzing was perfect, his dress irreproachable, and his admiration of, and devotion to, beauty so notorious, as to render his notice a certificate sufficient to obtain for any woman in Europe a place in all the books of beauty that were published.

What could such a woman as Miss Thorwold wish for more? To obtain him she would have sacrificed all the friends, as well as all the lovers in the world, and at the moment when, more than half despairing, she at length won the precious prize, she was too giddy with the speed and the exertion she had used, during the last part of the race, to be

quite capable of examining carefully the ground immediately around the goal.

But the time was now coming for her to know a great deal more about him than she had ever done before. She had great confidence in herself, poor young lady, and a strong persuasion that when she chose to exert herself, nobody could effectually make head against her, and now she had quite made up her mind that she would exert herself. Once for all it was necessary to make her husband understand that she was a very resolute and determined person; for so only could this nonsense about keeping their marriage secret be put an end to. She had already lived above a month in possession of the name and title she most coveted, without having heard either pronounced, excepting by Mrs. Stedworth, and let what would be the consequence she was determined that this should continue no longer.

"Is he about to do it?" she repeated, in a tone that she did not intend to render gentle. "Speak, sir; I shall endure this child's play, this utter foolery, no longer."

Lord William's face at that moment was not one in which might be read strange matters, for it would have been pretty nearly impossible for the most acute to have read any thing in it at all. It was impossible. There were the features too large and too elongated to be handsome, yet too regular and too well kept in drawing-room shape, to be absolutely ugly ; there they were, eyes, mouth, and all, exactly before the eyes of Amelia, and evidently rather seeking her gaze than avoiding it, but without betraying the very slightest particle of expression which might lead her to judge how he relished her attack.

"Do you think the dinner is nearly ready?" said he, in a voice as void of all expression as his features. "At any rate, I presume I shall have time to wash my hands ;" and so saying, he walked very quietly out of the drawing-room into the bedroom, and, without shutting the door, commenced the operation.

Amelia was a little puzzled, but not in the least degree frightened. She was married. That of itself had removed one ever-present

source of dread and doubt ; and she was married to the son of a duke. This, too, had removed the dread and doubt concerning the chances of her obtaining a title, or not obtaining it ; so that, instead of being frightened, she felt more full of courage than she had ever done in her life.

But she was puzzled, and condescended to employ the time occupied by her noble bridegroom in brushing his nails, and carefully setting them to rights with a towel, in meditating upon what it would be most spirited, and most conclusive, to say next.

His lordship re-entered the room with the same immoveable composure of countenance with which he had left it. The dinner followed immediately, and, while it lasted, the presence of Mrs. Stedworth's maid, who had the honour, for the present, of filling the joint posts of butler and footman, prevented the conversation from becoming interesting. Her ladyship, however, was not silent, finding fault, in a manner which she had never done before, with the dishes, the plates, the knives,

the forks, the spoons, the glasses, the tablecloth, and the napkins.

Nor was the silence of his lordship carried to an extent that was at all remarkable, for he said "yes" repeatedly, though not always quite *à propos*.

At length, however, they were again tête-à-tête, and Amelia immediately profited by the circumstance, expressing, with the most perfect freedom, her extreme weariness of the life she was leading, and her determination of putting an end to it directly, by either writing to, or seeing, the Duke of Watertown, and informing him, as well as all her other friends and acquaintance, of her marriage.

Lord William had his eyes fixed upon her during the whole time that she was saying this, but it was rather with the eye of a connoisseur critically examining a picture, than of a man listening to a spirited remonstrance from his wife.

This put her a good deal out of patience, for she knew that she was not well prepared

for such an examination ; and, although she had neglected her appearance, on purpose to show him that he was not to go on for ever expecting that she should spend her life in trying to please him, and no one else, she did not greatly relish this very deliberate examination of herself and her toilet.

“ Upon my honour, my lord, I think you would show infinitely more common sense if you would converse with me upon the subject which you must perceive occupies my thoughts, instead of staring at my pale face and undressed hair. Have no fears, my lord, that the wife you have chosen will disgrace you in the circle wherein we have both been accustomed to move, by any deficiency in beauty, in grace, in elegance, or neatness. Nature has done a good deal for me, Lord William, and I have no scruple in promising to do the rest when I again find myself in a situation to make it worth my while, and depend upon it, my good sir, that if I do not speedily recover that situation, the failure shall arise from no fault of mine. Tell me, Lord William, without further foolery or

delay, when is it your intention to take me from this detestable lodging, and to place me either in this country or any other that you may prefer, in a position more befitting your wife ? Answer me this question, my lord, and I shall then know what it is my duty to do."

There was one solitary bottle of claret wine upon the table ; Lord William took it up, and with a very gentlemanlike air said : " May I offer you some wine, Amelia ?"

She did not refuse it, but on the contrary, slightly advanced her glass towards him. He filled it, and then he also filled his own, and having bowed to her in token that he drank her health, he swallowed the wine, quietly rose from his chair, looked at her for half an instant as he turned the lock of the door, and left the room.

Amelia had never in the whole course of her life felt so vehemently angry as she did at that moment. The quiet affectation of civility with which he had treated her, so very plainly showing that he feared her not, was infinitely more trying to her temper than any violence could have been.

“ And he dares to fancy I may be mastered thus !” she muttered through her closed teeth. “ Oh ! thoroughly shall he find himself mistaken !” A minute or two was thus wasted in very idle rage, and then she started up to follow him.

“ He shall not leave the house till I have fully explained my purpose,” thought she ; “ he shall not have to say that I have taken him by surprise,” and she opened the drawing-room door and began hastily to descend the stairs, expecting to reach the bottom before he had closed the door of the house behind him.

But though she had stepped rapidly she was too late to catch sight of him. On reaching the passage she found it quite unoccupied ; yet she was unconscious of having heard the house door shut, a sound which generally made itself heard over the greater part of the house.

“ Wretch !” she murmured, “ he made me too angry to hear any thing, but this night shall be the last of my degradation and imprisonment.”

She paused awhile before she re-ascended the stairs to decide whether she should or should not confide to her friend, Mrs. Stedworth, the real state of the case, and ask her opinion as to the best, the shortest, and the safest way of communicating her marriage to the duke, which for many reasons she thought it would be wise to do, before she announced it to her uncle, and having thought about it for a moment, she descended the few stairs she had already mounted, and approached the door of the parlour in which, at this hour, Mrs. Stedworth was generally to be found alone.

She felt, however, that she was not in a condition to meet the eyes of any one less in her confidence than her landlady, and she therefore stood for a moment at the door before she opened it, in order to be quite sure she was alone.

Greatly did she rejoice that she had taken this precaution, for she presently became aware that there were at least two persons in the room, for she heard voices in conversation, though the sounds came so indistinctly

as to make her suppose that those engaged in it were speaking in whispers, and therefore probably as little desirous of her presence as she was of theirs. She was confirmed in this supposition by distinctly hearing the bolt of the door shot, a precaution which probably arose from her step having been heard without.

“God bless the good woman ! she need not fear that I want to be a spy upon her,” thought the indulgent Amelia, as she turned away with half a smile, and retraced her steps to her own apartment.

Amelia was indeed quite right in supposing that she would not have been so cordially received by her accommodating hostess had she ever shown any propensity for inquiring more into her goings on in any way than the said landlady volunteered to tell her. Mrs. Stedworth lived on very friendly and confidential terms with many of her lady customers, besides Miss Thorwold ; but the confidential part of their intercourse was not always mutual, Mrs. Stedworth having it

almost always in her power to repay by usefulness the unreserve of others, preferred that mode to the much less satisfactory one of gossiping about her own affairs in return.

Mrs. Stedworth was still a very handsome woman, and it would have been endless work had they thought it necessary to inquire how many lovers she had had, before they ventured to employ her. It was much more to the purpose to ascertain that she was employed, and highly favoured, by many ladies of high fashion—and these were inquiries which never failed to produce very satisfactory answers.

So Amelia went up stairs again, much more quickly than she had come down, and she took coffee, and then tea, and then a novel, and then her bed, her spirits recovering their usual calmness, as the hours wore away, but without losing one atom of steadfast purpose by their composure. Had she known that it was Lord William who was passing the evening in the parlour below her, it is just possible that she might not have

enjoyed so great a degree of philosophical calmness; but being happily ignorant of it, she not only went quietly to bed, but slept so soundly as to be quite unconscious of the continual absence of his lordship, till the next morning, when it became quite evident to her that nobody had occupied the sleeping apartment besides herself.

Her delicate cheeks wanted no rouge when she first made this discovery.

“Very well, my lord!—go on!—you are doing me all the good in the world! The only thing which could interfere to prevent my gaining exactly all I want by your name and connexion, would be my continuing to care one single farthing about your love. And if this sort of thing does not cure me, I must be desperately bad indeed.”

Having muttered this philosophical soliloquy, the fair Amelia rose and dressed herself, and determining not to blunder in the bold game she was about to play, for want of the assistance of a faithful friend and counsellor, she desired the maid-servant who

brought in her breakfast to inform her mistress that she desired to speak with her. The message was promptly delivered, and as promptly obeyed, and Amelia once more found herself seated tête-à-tête with her confidential friend, Mrs. Stedworth.

CHAPTER XIII.

"WELL! my dear good woman!" began the discontented-looking bride, "I have more strange news to tell you now. You will fancy, I suppose, that I have a prodigiously strong taste for adventures; but I protest to you, it is no such thing; on the contrary, I should vastly prefer going on to the end of time in the most jog-trot style in the world, provided only that the vehicle which carried me was fit for the use of a woman of fashion."

"I hope that nothing has happened to vex your ladyship?" said Mrs. Stedworth, with her fine large eyes turned towards the ground, and a general air of peculiar modesty and meekness pervading her whole appearance.

"My ladyship does not intend to be vexed, Mrs. Stedworth, by any thing of the kind, I promise you. But his lordship has thought proper to absent himself during the whole night."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Mrs. Stedworth. And she spread her long, well-formed, whitish hand before her eyes, to testify that she was overwhelmed by the intelligence.

"Don't be tragic, goody Stedworth, for mercy's sake, or I must send you off instantly. The love part of the story is, I presume, pretty well over on both sides, and I rather suspect that we are both of us so essentially fashionable people that we do not appear to advantage either in the rural haunts of village swains, or in the orbit of such a snug little mouse-hole as your drawing-room, my dear Stedworth. But we all of us, I suppose, know well enough that marriage was only invented as a cure for love, and well it is that there is some cure, for Heaven knows that while the madness lasts, the wisest amongst us are little better than fools ;

nevertheless, with all my folly, and I will not deny that I have had my share, I never quite overlooked what I certainly consider as the principal object in existence. I never overlooked the rank and station of the individual about whom I permitted my fancy to run riot. But, do you know, my good woman—I don't believe you hear a word of what I am saying to you. There you sit, with your eyes fixed upon the carpet, as if you were counting the threads of it, instead of listening to me. What on earth is come to you? Do rouse yourself—I really want your advice, Mrs. Stedworth."

"I am sure, Miss Thorwold—I beg your pardon, Lady William I mean; I am sure I always have been, and always shall be, ready and willing to do any thing and every thing I can to assist you. But I have got one of my terrible headaches to-day, it is no good to deny it, and I know they always make me look heavy and stupid."

"That is very unlucky, and of course I am very sorry for it," replied her ladyship, looking, however, as if she thought there was a

good deal of impertinence in her having a headache at such a time. "But upon my word, Stedworth, you must please to forget it just for the present, for I have a great deal to do, and to think of, and I really want you to help me."

"And I am sure, ma'am, I shall be only too happy to do any thing I can to serve you," replied Mrs. Stedworth, suddenly rising and walking to the window.

"Do sit still then, will you, and not trot about the room so absurdly," returned Amelia, frowning with as much right honourable dignity, as if she fancied herself married to the duke, instead of his brother.

But Mrs. Stedworth appeared not to hear her, and not only continued standing, and looking out of the window, but took the liberty of walking from one window to the other that she might the better amuse herself, as it seemed, by looking up the street, and down the street. After a minute or two, however, she seemed conscious of what had been said to her, and obeying the commands of her ladyship, replaced herself in the chair she had

been desired to occupy, with the air of a person intending to listen unresistingly to all that was going to be said.

"Now then, let me tell you how I am situated," said Amelia. "The secrecy, which, as you know—" But before she could finish the sentence, she was interrupted by the entrance of the servant of the house, who stepped rapidly towards her, and put a letter into her hand. "How did this come?" said she, looking up rather earnestly in the girl's face, for she perceived that the address was in the handwriting of her husband, and it occurred to her that he had probably left it himself.

Amelia while waiting for the girl's answer, was in the act of breaking the seal, but even at that moment, though pretty completely occupied by her own affairs, she was struck by the expression of the girl's countenance. She had evidently been weeping, and her whole aspect, which was usually very gentle and pleasing, had now something rude and rough in it, that she could not understand.

"Where did you get this letter? Don't you hear me?" said Amelia, frowning.

"I got it from the gentleman that is just gone out?" replied the girl.

"What gentleman?" demanded Amelia, impatiently.

"The gentleman that has been lodging here," returned the maid, in a tone as cross as that in which the question was asked.

"The gentleman that has been lodging here?" repeated Amelia. "Just gone out? Just come in, I suppose you mean?"

"No, I don't," replied the girl, with as little civility as was well possible.

"You are extremely impertinent to speak in the way you do, you saucy minx," said Mrs. Stedworth. "Go out of the room this moment."

"Yes, I will," replied the offender. "And out of the house too," she added, while her young face became as red as scarlet. "It don't suit me."

Mrs. Stedworth rose, and with considerable vehemence pushed the girl towards the door.

"Away with you, then, you huzzy," she exclaimed; "you got your wages yesterday,

so no more need be said. You are a right bad one, or I am very much mistaken. Be off! And I will be off too, to watch you, or I may find myself a few silver spoons the poorer."

The girl burst into tears, but said no more, and Mrs. Stedworth pushing her out before her, left the room and shut the door upon Amelia, and her letter.

The unfortunate beauty was by this time too deeply engaged in the perusal of it, to have heard any thing that passed, but she rejoiced in the consciousness that she was alone. The first words were indeed such as to produce emotions too violent to be witnessed. This tremendous letter was as follows :

" My dear Miss Thorwold.

" You are still too lovely a woman for me not to regret, for your sake, as well as my own, that you have not been contented to suffer the soft cloud which enveloped us so delightfully, to remain over us a little longer. But it is your will to tear it off, and I must submit. Were it not for the marvellously wife-

like tone which you assumed in our last conversation, my beautiful Amelia, I certainly should not think it possible that with your excellent good sense, and knowledge of the world, you could scarcely believe that the ceremony which has passed between us was any thing but a farce, calculated chiefly to amuse the good woman with whom we have been so comfortably lodged. She seems to be rather particularly strict in her notions upon such subjects, and I dare say we should not have been able to manage matters conveniently without it. But that you, my dear creature, could for a moment believe that I, of all men in the world, that I, in the sadly embarrassed state of my finances should run my free neck into the noose of matrimony, with a lady whom I have every reason to believe is as unlike Miss Upton Savage in her purse, as in her features ; that you, my lovely Miss Thorworld, should believe this, I freely confess, does appear to me almost impossible.

“It would, however, be extremely wrong for me to doubt your word on this subject, and therefore I am bound to believe that you really

fancy yourself my wife. If this be so, I must not shrink from the disagreeable task of undeceiving you. You are not my wife, my beautiful Amelia, but you have been to me infinitely dearer than any wife is ever likely to be, for it is now pretty evident that the only course left for me is to marry according to my imperious brother's very disagreeable wishes. I need say no more, Amelia, on this hateful subject. I am quite sure you will pity me. As to you, my sweet girl, though your conduct and manner last night, certainly vexed me a good deal, I do, and ever shall, feel a degree of tender interest for you which must always make your happiness a subject of deep anxiety to me.

"At this painful moment of parting, it is a great satisfaction to me to remember that you are not, as yet, in the slightest degree committed in the eyes of your friends; a blessing, my dear Miss Thorwold, which is rarely enjoyed by a single lady in your rank of life, after yielding herself with a little too much facility to the affections of the heart.

"But every thing, my sweet friend, seems

to have favoured you. I saw in the papers of yesterday, that your friend, Caroline Marchmont, is just dead at Nice. Nothing can be easier than for you to take advantage of this most happy coincidence.

“ I recommend your immediate return to Crosby. I know you have formerly been at Nice, and there will, therefore, be no danger of your being thrown out concerning the localities. All you have to do, is to return to Mrs. Knight, in mourning, and a good deal out of spirits at the loss of your friend. Then will follow, of course, a full explanation with Colonel Dermont and his family on the melancholy cause of your sudden absence; and I trust the fulfilment of your engagement with the young man will not be long delayed. A lover of twenty-one, or rather less, I believe, is easily urged to speed; and there are a thousand reasons, my sweet friend, which will make your immediate marriage a most pleasing event to me. I am sorry for the little roughness which took place between us last night. Let it be forgotten, my dear Miss Thorwold, and

nothing remembered but the happiness we have enjoyed in each other's society.

"And now I must say adieu ! But I see no reason why it should be a lasting one. I have no doubt that your influence over your young bridegroom will be omnipotent ; and if so, you will of course make him bring you to London. And then, Amelia, we may meet again ; and if you will only promise me never again, while you are on the right side of forty, to let me see you looking as you did last night, I, on my side, will venture to promise you, that nothing could give me greater pleasure than being permitted to repeat the assurance of the affectionate esteem with which I now subscribe myself,

"Yours, faithfully,

"WILLIAM HAMMOND."

Amelia shed no tears as she perused this precious document. No particle of softness mixed itself with the indignant rage which made her bosom swell ; neither did she exhaust her strength in calling him a wretch and traitor.

Had he, indeed, been securely bound within her reach, and a sharp stiletto in her grasp, it is possible he might have felt the force of a woman's fury; but as it was, Amelia thought much more of herself than of him. But while she was profoundly meditating on the possibility of actually executing the righteous scheme he had so ably sketched, an idea suddenly shot through her head, that not a word of what the letter contained might be true. Had she not been married in church? Were there not witnesses? Had not the woman Stedworth, and the man Morrison put their names as witnesses to the certificate she had so carefully secured in her writing-desk? Was not the infamous letter she held in her hand sufficient proof that the writer of it was villain enough to foreswear the most solemn marriage that ever bound man and woman together, provided only that his inclination or interest prompted him to do it, and that there was a fair chance of doing so with safety?

The obvious answer to this question caused

her to rise and ring the bell violently. It was answered by Mrs. Stedworth.

"Nothing the matter, ma'am, is there?" she said, entering the room with a face that seemed preparing itself to be frightened.

"Read that letter, Mrs. Stedworth," said Amelia, in reply.

Mrs. Stedworth took the letter and retired with it to the window, where she appeared to read it from beginning to end with the greatest attention, and a very proper proportion of horror and astonishment into the bargain.

"Oh! my dear lady! what can I say to you?" exclaimed Mrs. Stedworth, clasping her hands. "Is it possible that this terrible letter can be true?"

"Is it possible that you can ask the question?" said Amelia. "Are you not able to swear upon your own knowledge that it is false? Were you not yourself a witness to the ceremony? Did you not yourself see it performed in a church, and by a clergyman?"

"To be sure I did, my dear young lady," replied Mrs. Stedworth, with a sort of happy

smile, which seemed to show that the recollection of all this had relieved her mind from a vast deal of anxiety. "To be sure I did! How could I be such a fool, even for a moment, to put faith in such a contemptible falsehood. I am sorry to my heart, my dear lady, that my lord is not a better man, but such as he is, he is your husband sure enough, let him invent what lies he will to prove the contrary."

"And that man, Morrison, my dear Mrs. Stedworth? Do you happen to know where he lives, or any thing about him? My worthless lord gave me to understand that he was an intimate friend of his; which, all things considered, does him no particular honour, but at any rate it must place him in such a rank as will ensure his being listened to as a witness.—Why do you bite your lip in that way? Why do you turn away from me?"

"Never look at me! Never mind me, my dear precious lady!" replied the landlady, in great apparent agitation. "It is all nonsense, I am quite sure and certain that it is all nonsense, and you must not mind me. But

I will set my own mind at rest about it before I lay down to sleep."

"You will drive me mad, Mrs. Stedworth," cried Amelia impetuously, "if you go on uttering dark hints, that it is plain you do not intend I should understand. Pray do not pretend to fancy that this is the way to spare my feelings. I would rather ten thousand times that you would tell me at once that you know I am not married at all."

"God forbid, my dearest Miss Thorwold—my dearest Lady William, I would say, God forbid that I should ever utter such cruel words as those you have just spoken; and so far short of that were my thoughts, that I won't go on to make any scruple at all as to speaking what really did come into my head. I won't deny, Miss Thor—my lady, I mean—I won't attempt to deny that I was struck with the very odd out-of-the-way look of the clergyman. And now you speak of that man, Morrison, as a friend of my lord, I see no use in denying that I said to myself, when I first looked at him, which was just

after we got inside the church, I did say to myself, and that's the truth, that of all the gentlemen I ever saw, he had the least look of one. And, as to the clerk, there was a man who came forward by way of a clerk—I don't know whether you observed him, Miss Thorwold—my lady, I would say,—I don't know whether you happened to observe him, but I did, and really he might have been first cousin to the parson as far as his looks went."

"By all which, Mrs. Stedworth, I must presume that you mean to express doubts of the reality of my marriage. Speak plainly, if you please ; is it not so ?"

Had the unfortunate Amelia asked this question with any strong symptoms either of sorrow or of anger, it is possible that her excellent friend, Mrs. Stedworth, might have thought it proper, or at any rate humane, to have beat a little more about the bush before she answered yes. But there was such an admirable air of coolness and self-possession in the manner with which the fair questioner

awaited her answer, that she ventured to give it with the bold sincerity which seemed to be wished for.

“ Well then, Miss Thorwold, if it is your will that I should speak all my thoughts fully and truly, I will tell you at once, painful as it is to do so, that the more I think about his lordship’s letter, the more afraid I feel that it is true. At the first moment, it seemed to me quite ridiculous, and all that came into my head was, that I had seen you married with my own eyes; but the bare mention of the name of Morrison brought back the fellow’s look and manner to my mind so strongly, that I can’t help feeling that it makes this shocking statement the more likely. But that is all I say, my dear lady, I don’t mean to say that it is any thing like proof, any more than the looks of the clergyman and clerk. It would be folly and sin both, to take it in that light ; but this I do think, that it behoves me to make inquiries, and that brings me to what I said before, which was, that I won’t rest this

night, without getting at the truth, one way or the other."

"You are perfectly right, my dear Mrs. Stedworth. Nothing else can be of any real use to me. While you have been thinking over the looks of the parson and the clerk, I, my good friend, have been setting my wits to meditate on the real value of Lord William in the capacity of a husband, and truly the meditation has not ended by my wishing to keep very fast hold of him. That he is a villain of the very blackest dye, is quite evident, take the question in which way you will ; and, in truth, I hardly know which side of it presents him as the vilest scoundrel. But that signifies little. My interest in the matter, and of course yours, too, my dear woman, is, as to which way we can make this horrible business end with the least injury to me. If we prove the marriage to be a true one, I am Lady William Hammond, that is quite certain ; and it is quite certain, also, that the being Lady William Hammond is the very thing upon which I had set my

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heart. But just fancy the sort of way in which I should make my appearance as a bride, if this infamous wretch chooses to persevere in his story? Its being false, will make very little difference in the only set that I much care about. Every body knows he is an abominable libertine, which will make it appear at any rate probable ; and I know there are dozens of women, maids, wives, and widows, who would take good care to make people suppose they believed it, whether they did or not. The doubtful Lady William-ship is, therefore, a very doubtful blessing ; and as to any comfort to be derived from wealth, I happen to know perfectly well that he is not only penniless, but desperately deep in debt. My few little innocent hundreds in that line are not worth mentioning in comparison."

"For all these excellent reasons," continued Amelia, fanning herself rather vehemently, (for the room was both small and hot,) "for all these reasons, Mrs. Stedworth, I do positively declare to you, that, provided I can trust to your fidelity respecting what has

happened between this hateful man and me, I would rather believe the ceremony which united us to be fictitious than real."

"Thank Heaven that I hear you say so, dear lady!" replied Mrs. Stedworth; "I shall now set about the work of inquiry with courage; for that inquiry must immediately be made is certain. Let it end as it will, no doubt must be left upon the subject."

"Assuredly, my good friend," replied Amelia, eagerly, "a great deal depends upon your being able to prove to me that in good truth I am Amelia Thorwold still. You have not forgotten, I am very sure, all that I told you in the letter which I wrote from the house of Colonel Dermont; have you?"

"Indeed I have not, my dear," replied Mrs. Stedworth, with suddenly increased familiarity, arising from the brilliant rapidity with which she caught Amelia's meaning. "You need not go on, dear. I see it all as plain as if it were written down in a book before me. You are the same clever creature I ever thought you, though I suspect you did suffer yourself to be a little taken in by his lordship."

“ Oh ! as to that, Stedworth, it is a sort of thing that no woman, let her be ever so clever, need be ashamed of. Neither women of fashion nor women of sense are exempted from the dear perils of love, you know ; and the superiority of some over others, is not, in my opinion, so much shown by coldness and caution, as by the manner in which what destroys one, is passed through by another with impunity. If I can really contrive to bring things back to the state in which they were when I wrote that letter, I will fairly confess to you, dear Stedworth, though to nobody else in the world, that I think I shall rather have gained than lost by my adventure. I mean to say that if I can manage, you know, to make all that has happened pass away as if it had been a dream, and nothing else, I should do what you and I are both thinking of, with a monstrous deal less repugnance than I should before ; and I really do not see why I should not. My abominable Don Juan will take care to keep silent for his own sake ; and you, dear Stedworth, will keep silent for mine.

Not, however, that I shall ever forget, in case this *should* happen, how much I owe you ; and one reason that will make it pleasant for me to think that in that direction, at least, there is plenty of money, so that I shall have the power of helping you."

" But don't you think, my dear, that such a termination of it all, as you hint at, and which of course I understand perfectly well ; don't you think, my dear, that it would be almost too painful for his lordship, who seemed, only a few days ago, to be so very much in love with you ?"

" Painful to him ? I wish I thought that I could plague him in any way, my dear soul ! But it will not be in that manner, at any rate. If I *could* but contrive to make it known in the right places, that the creature wears false hair on the top of his good-for-nothing, handsome head, and dyes all the rest, it *might* answer. But I don't know exactly how to manage this without running the risk of betraying a little better acquaintance with the divine Apollo than I may think it discreet to acknowledge.

"But we must not amuse ourselves in this way," added Amelia, laughing, "or at any rate we must postpone doing so, till I really know which of his lordship's two infernal lies is the real one. Will you set off directly, my dear, good Stedworth? I do assure you that you ought not to lose a moment. Trust me, that every thing will depend upon the promptitude, as well as the boldness of our measures."

"And trust me, my dear, that no grass shall grow under my feet, nor under that of my cab-horse either, before I bring you back such a yes, or no, as you may depend upon."

This was said by the friendly Mrs. Stedworth, as she left the room, and in a very few minutes afterwards, Amelia had the satisfaction of seeing her climb into a cab, and drive off towards Piccadilly at full gallop.

The interval which followed, certainly seemed rather a long one; but it would have appeared longer still to a person less capable of sedate meditation upon all the circumstances which surrounded her, than was Amelia.

It might truly be said, that among all the variety of events past, present, and possible, which called for her attention, there was scarcely one that escaped her ; and nothing could be more boldly strong-minded and masterly, than the order in which she arranged them all before her, in such a manner as might enable her to decide, the very moment her messenger returned, how she should act, and what she should do.

The day was considerably advanced, when Mrs. Stedworth re-appeared in the drawing-room, but she looked so weary and exhausted, that it was impossible to doubt her having made all the haste she could.

Of course, Amelia, notwithstanding all her admirable strength of mind, did feel a good deal of anxiety to hear the first word her messenger should utter ; but so evenly had she contrived to balance her wishes between MARRIED, or NOT MARRIED, that not even the air of melancholy which Mrs. Stedworth's countenance wore, sufficed to shake her equanimity.

“ What would become of me, my dear,”

said the poor woman, seating herself with every appearance of being quite exhausted, "what would become of me, at this moment, had I not heard you say what you did say before I went out? It is dreadful to think of the wickedness of men! But as sure as you sit there, my dear, you are no more Lady William Hammond than I am."

"Villain!" exclaimed Amelia, setting her teeth, and looking for a moment as if the rage produced by knowing she had been deceived, was sufficient to overcome the pleasure with which, a moment before, she had been looking forward to the power of deceiving. But this emotion, or, at least, the demonstration of it, was but transitory. "For goodness' sake, don't cant, Stedworth," she said sharply, "tell me how the matter stands at once."

"I will, my dear, I will, if I have breath for it. The church to which you went to be married, is, as you must have seen if you had looked round it, under repair. His lordship got hold of two of the workmen, who not only agreed to act as parson and clerk,

but also got at the clergyman's dress, and book, and every thing. As to his friend, Morrison, the rascal was his own servant. And this was the way, my poor, dear child, in which we were both fooled! What a deep creature he must be, mustn't he?"

"Deep?" repeated the indignant Amelia, "he will be deep enough by and bye, if all be true that is taught. But the banns, Stedworth? Had he really the audacity to have the banns published?"

"God bless you, my dear, no—not he, indeed. The whole business, from beginning to end, was humbug, and nothing else."

Again Amelia ground her teeth, and muttered, "Villain!" but she recovered herself immediately, and said, with as much composure as if her destiny was the most assured and happy that ever fell to the lot of mortal. "I shall have a letter or two to write this morning, Stedworth, and I wish you would let Susan bring me up something by way of dinner immediately."

"I shall be very happy to wait upon you myself, Miss Thorwold." Amelia started

as this name, unchecked, as heretofore, by an after-thought, was thus bluntly addressed to her. "I beg your pardon, a thousand times, my dear young lady, if I have given you pain," said Mrs. Stedworth, in her best manner, "but basely as you have been defrauded of another name, it is surely best to accustom yourself to this, lest the starting from it before other eyes might lessen your opportunities of selecting another."

"Selecting!" muttered the ill-treated beauty. "But all this is very silly. You are quite right, my good friend, and pray let me hear myself called Miss Thorwold as much as you think proper."

"Would you like better that I should call you Amelia, my dear?" said the kind woman.

"No, I thank you," replied the lady, colouring; "I will not trouble you to do any thing so unusual. But what was it you were going to say to me when I so foolishly interrupted you?"

"I was going to say, my dear, that I should be happy to wait on you myself,

because that good-for-nothing Susan has positively forced me, at last, to turn her out of the house. She is a thorough bad girl, if ever there was one."

"Well, well, never mind Susan, but let me have something to eat immediately, I shall not feel easy till I have written my letters."

It was not Mrs. Stedworth, however, but a sufficiently dirty charwoman, who brought up Amelia's black-looking little chicken. It was very odd; she had certainly never seen a chicken look so before during all the time she had been in the house. Was it an accident? Or was it, indeed, because she was not Lady William Hammond? The doubt did not tend to improve her appetite, but it increased the haste with which she dismissed the meal, and set about the composition of her letters. She wrote two. The first was to Mrs. Dermont, and was as follows:—

"My dearest Mrs. Dermont,

"You will, I doubt not, have seen by the papers that my poor friend, Caroline March-

mont, is no more! The few weeks I passed with her at Nice were, as you will easily believe, extremely painful, but I can never cease to rejoice that I was with her to the very last. Her affection and gratitude to me were unbounded. I only remained at Nice till the funeral was over, and then took advantage of the protection of a worthy French merchant, who, with his wife, was going to Paris, in order to return from my short but very melancholy banishment. The Marchmont family are gone on to Italy and kindly wished me to accompany them. But—I know not why I should fear to confess it—my heart is in England; dear, domestic, happy England! And to England I determined to return. And now, my dear and kind Mrs. Dermont, I am going to open my heart to you as I would to a mother. And I am quite, quite sure you will not betray me. When the news of my poor friend's illness reached me at Crosby, accompanied with her earnest request, seconded by that of her unhappy family, that I would accompany them abroad, I instantly decided that I would comply with

it, but on mentioning my intention to my dear friend, Mrs. Knight, she laughed. Yes, kind as I have ever found her, she, at that very painful moment, made light of the agony from which I was suffering, and ridiculed the idea of my complying with my friend's request. I am now quite aware that she must have done this from an excellent motive—namely, the hope of preventing me from taking a journey which she, doubtless, foresaw must end in the melancholy event which has too surely taken place; and it was her wish to spare me the witnessing this which led her to adopt the tone which wounded me so cruelly. But, at the moment, my heart rebelled against what appeared to me to be a great want of feeling, and I grieve to say, that I left her house without taking leave of her. Under these circumstances, my dear Mrs. Dermont, I cannot volunteer a renewal of my visit to her previously to my returning to my usual abode with Lord and Lady Ripley. And yet I cannot resist the too strong inclination which I feel to revisit the dear neighbourhood of Stoke before returning to

my usual home. I have experienced too much kindness from Mrs. Knight to doubt that a very short interview would suffice to set every thing right between us. But I cannot present myself at her door, after having passed through it the last time in so very ungracious a manner.

“ May I, my dear madam, in this painful dilemma, ask you again to extend your hospitality to me? It may appear to you, perhaps, under all the circumstances, as rather a singular request. But where the heart speaks as distinctly as mine does, the voice of ceremony and etiquette is, I believe, but seldom listened to. I shall eagerly await your answer, and whether it be *yea* or *nay*, I entreat you to believe me ever most respectfully and affectionately yours,

“ AMELIA THORWOLD.”

The second letter was to Mrs. Knight, and ran thus:

“ My dearest Mrs. Knight,

“ I hope you have long ago forgiven me for the impetuosity which made me leave

you so abruptly, as sincerely as I have forgiven you for the caustic ridicule with which you treated my really sincere affection for my poor lost Caroline. Of course you know that the last act of that sad tragedy is over. I remained with the family till the day after the funeral, but declined their earnest invitation to accompany them to Rome, where they intend to pass the winter. I might, perhaps, have been tempted, notwithstanding the melancholy which reigns among them, to have taken this opportunity of looking at the immortal Apollo, had not sundry very sober and rational hours of meditation convinced me that I can never reasonably hope for any thing better than the fate which you have of late been so earnestly recommending to me. In truth, I now dislike the idea of it much less than I did. The utter heartlessness of the man to whom I have so long given more thoughts than he was worth, has completely cured me of that fancy. I now see him as he really is, and this might suffice to cure a tenderer love than mine. This is an opportunity so

favourable for renewing my acquaintance in a certain quarter, that I do not hesitate to profit by it, and I have, therefore, written to good Mrs. Dermont, mentioning my little *fracas* with you, and asking permission to come to the Mount till such a time as we should have met and made it up. I hope I shall receive an agreeable answer from her, and, if so, I think all will go well. You must not be startled at seeing me in deep mourning. I could not well avoid it. Adieu, my dear friend! In the hope of soon meeting more pleasantly than we parted, I remain ever faithfully and affectionately yours,

“AMELIA THORWOLD.”

The delight of Mrs. Dermont at receiving the letter addressed to her by the beautiful idol of her son's affections, was great indeed, and never in her whole life, perhaps, had she felt more completely happy than when she set off with it in her hand to seek him in his favourite retreat in the shrubbery. This favourite retreat was the same bench on which she had found him seated,

with Julia standing before him, some short three months before, when she had sought him, with his father, for the purpose of asking his opinion respecting her fête on the lawn.

The good lady, though not much accustomed to take comprehensive views on any subject, could not help thinking as she walked from the house into the "wilderness," what a wonderful change had been wrought among them all, during this short interval. Alfred, although she had considered him then as the most important young man that ever lived, was now, beyond all question, become a more important young man still. And little Julia too; though, of course, nothing which had happened, or which could have happened to her, could be accounted of the same consequence, she could not help smiling, as she thought of the marvellous alteration which three months had made in her. An offer of marriage! a splendid offer of marriage! And refused too, as if she expected for herself, and they all expected for her, the power of picking and

choosing through all the world. And she to, just the very day before the fête, such a very particularly plain-looking young little thing! And now, this most beautiful and admired young lady, writing to her in such a sweet daughter-like way, and making her feel happier than ever she did in her whole life before, by showing so plainly by her charming letter, that if Alfred loved her she loved Alfred too, and that, well enough to make her do what very few young ladies in her situation, pretty creature, would have had the courage to think of.

And lucky it was for Amelia that this excellent lady did so truly and sincerely think that where her son Alfred was concerned, all ordinary rules of action might be laid aside with the most perfect impunity, as otherwise, it is more than probable that the frankness of the beautiful Amelia's proceeding might have appeared to her rather startling.

But it would be stuff and nonsense to think any thing of the kind in the present case, and the woman who would think of

treating *him* as she would do any other young man, could not be worthy of becoming his wife.

Smiling pleasantly, as she thought of all this, and with the open letter in her hand, she set off to find her son. And she did find him exactly where she expected, and what was odd enough, considering how she had been thinking about the last time she had looked for him there, she found Julia with him. The only difference was, that Julia was not standing now, but sitting on the bench beside him. Alfred was leaning back, his shoulders supported against the trunk of an elm-tree that shaded and sheltered this favourite spot both from sun and wind.

It was an autumnal breeze which now whistled through its branches, yet still the seat was a very pleasant seat; Alfred leaned back, and his eyes were fixed apparently upon a bed of now blossomless American shrubs which occupied the space before him. But there was something in the look that made it doubtful whether he indeed saw what was before

him. Julia was not looking in the same direction; she was sitting sideways upon the bench, and not only looking at Alfred but seeing him.

The last four or five weeks had done much towards tranquillising her spirits; she no longer either scorned or reproached herself so severely for loving where she was not loved. She had been brought up in the belief that Alfred was not an ordinary mortal, and her peculiarly acute consciousness of this fact ought not as she began to think to be laid to her charge as a crime. The friendly kindness with which he had more than once expressed his satisfaction at her having refused Mr. Borrowdale's proposal, "because he did not think the young man sufficiently intellectual to be worthy of her;" and the unexpressed, but strongly felt alteration in his manner of treating her, no longer expressing himself as if he considered her merely as a child, had altogether soothed her greatly. Julia felt certain that she was not born to be a happy woman; but now she began to hope

that, with the blessing of Heaven upon her earnest endeavours to be contented with her lot, she should not be as wretched a one as she had thought she must be when she had first heard Alfred confess his passion for Miss Thorwold, at the very moment that she was expecting an avowal of love to herself.

And quite in conformity to this state of feeling was the expression of her sweet face. Her complexion, which was not so much pale as delicately white, was set off to the greatest possible advantage by her satin-like black hair, and by those long black eye-lashes which even when the eye itself was not seen, announced its rich darkness, and at that moment there was a gentle, placid, half-melancholy smile upon her lips which made her exquisitely white teeth a little visible; in short, she looked youngly, freshly, innocently lovely.

But Alfred did not see it ; he was gazing instead, (foolish youth !) most intently gazing upon the vision of Amelia, conjured into his presence by the joint agency of memory and

imagination, just as he had seen her waltzing in the drawing-room at Crosby, the last time he had ever looked at her.

“What are you thinking of, Alfred?” said his mother, gaily, “and who are you thinking of, my darling son? Shall I guess, Alfred?”

“Oh! mother, mother! it is no theme for jesting! Every moment of my life seems wire-drawn into an endless—what is it you have got there? Oh! give it to me, my dearest, dearest mother, if it be any thing that brings us news of her!”

“There! Take it, you dear impatient,” replied the happy lady, placing the precious letter in his hands, “and when you have read it, tell me what answer you think it will be most proper to return?”

“Answer? What answer shall you send, my dearest mother?” cried the enchanted Alfred, starting up, and looking as if he had wings on his shoulders, and already felt as if he were half way to heaven, “Come back! come back to the house this moment—come you too, Julia! you must come too, for you must read this divine letter to know how

supremely happy I am, and not for the wealth of worlds would I lose sight of it."

"Then I perceive I am to say yes, Alfred? Is that it?" said his well-pleased mother. "Unless Julia thinks we can say any thing more to the purpose," replied the young man, playfully bending over Julia as she read the precious scroll, and pointing with his finger to some of the most enchanting words.

Good Mrs. Dermont, who was in general rather dignified in her movements, now stepped more rapidly towards the house than she had ever done since she had first enjoyed the happiness of calling it her own. The colonel was sought for, and found in a field near the house; the blessed letter shown, his consent to the "yes," playfully asked, and joyously given; and the letter bag locked up and ready for the postman a good hour-and-a-half before he called for it.

It would be mere folly to attempt describing the ever increasing ecstasy of Alfred's feelings as the hour approached which was to bring the beautiful Amelia to his home for the avowed purpose, for so his bounding

heart whispered to him, of receiving the vows from which her too timid, too sensitive, delicacy had shrunk when last they parted. His happiness beamed in his beautiful eyes and seemed to sit triumphant on his noble brow. His father looked at him with proud delight. His mother with joy, admiration, and unbounded love. The very menials were made to understand that a great and most felicitous event was approaching. And they too, looked radiant with joy and strong beer, quaffed to the health of their young master and his beautiful bride.

And poor Julia! How did she look? In truth she let as few people see her looks as possible. For never before, no not even when Alfred first proclaimed to her his love, had she felt so utterly averse to the idea of his marriage as she did now.

There was something in the whole of Amelia's conduct which disgusted her, although she could by no means fully comprehend it. In vain did she tell herself that this averseness, which really almost amounted to terror, as she thought of the probable

speed with which this marriage was now likely to go on; it was in vain that she told herself that all these feelings were of course the natural consequence of her own unrequited affection, and of all the bitter regrets that were sure to follow it—regret for its being felt—regret for its being unrequited. It would not do. This was *not* the cause of her present uneasiness. Nor could she even to herself explain what was.

As neither the colonel, his lady, nor the thrice happy lover himself, had ever appeared for a single moment to perceive any thing strange, or in any way indecorous in her thus inviting herself to the home of her acknowledged, though not affianced lover, so young a girl as Julia could scarcely even to herself acknowledge that she thought them all wrong. But spite of all she could do to prevent it, the idea recurred to her again and again that, both in their parting and their meeting, there was something that looked as if she were *playing him*, as an angler does the fish that he has hooked.

“Dear, generous, warm-hearted Alfred!

whose very faults have been as carefully grafted into him, as if they had been so many cardinal virtues, and which have mixed so much of the native stock with their foreign nature, as one and all, to have become amiable—though not wise. This self-will is only an ardent energy of purpose; and what would be vanity in another, is in him but a generous confidence in the goodwill of all who approach him. And must I see such a being as this made prey of by such a thing as Amelia Thorwold? Oh! Alfred, my love is fatal to thee! But for this, she should never be thy wife. I would keep watch and ward over you both, and greatly am I mistaken if I should not find cause to make you all pause before the awful deed was done. But as it is! If ever, in after years, my pertinacity in living single, or any other symptom, were to open his eyes to the truth, might he not, to the very last hour of his life, suspect that my passion for him had caused me to use the blighting influence which had parted them? Could I bear this? would it not be worse than death?"

These, and such-like meditations, ceased not to torment poor Julia during the time which elapsed between the despatching the rapturous letter which announced Amelia's welcome, and the period of her arrival. And then her deep mourning, a sort of subdued look, that might be taken either for sorrow or sickness (though her complexion was, if any thing, rather more blooming than before), and a general air of gentle kindness to every body—herself included—if it did not quite set her heart at rest, as to her deserving all the devoted love which Alfred betrayed, sufficed to create just sufficient doubt, as to whether she might not have hitherto judged her rather harshly, to settle the question of interference or non-interference in the beauty's favour, and to determine her to let matters take their course, trusting that, if any thing very bad lay behind, Heaven would grant eyes to see it, to somebody besides herself.

END OF VOL. II.

Y O U N G L O V E ;

A N O V E L.

BY

MRS. TROLLOPE,

AUTHORESS OF "THE VICAR OF WREXHILL," "THE BARNABYS IN
AMERICA," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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Y O U N G L O V E.

CHAPTER I.

It would in truth have been impossible for Miss Thorwold to have returned either to the Mount, or to Crosby, under an aspect more calculated to produce the impression she desired, than that which she now assumed. To Alfred she appeared a mourning angel, coming to seek consolation in the tenderness of devoted love, for the heavy sorrow of bereaved friendship.

To his parents what could she seem, but the most beautiful young lady that ever lived,

who, notwithstanding her high birth and fashion, had given a most touching and decided proof that she really did love their matchless son as he deserved to be loved? Whilst even Mrs. Knight herself, notwithstanding a tolerably accurate previous knowledge of the young lady, now really did believe she had done her wrong in suspecting the sincerity of the feeling she had professed for her dying friend. She perfectly believed that she had been to Nice, and watched over her last moments, and certainly did not like her the worse, though she was a little surprised at it, for her having spent her uncle's fifty pound present in the trip.

She quite believed, too, and there she was not greatly wrong, that Lord William Hammond had at last done himself justice in the eyes of Amelia, and that having learned to judge him pretty accurately at his worth, she had been enabled at the same time to make a juster estimate than she had done before, of the value of Colonel Dermont's only and very handsome son, Alfred.

In short, every thing went on in the most happy and prosperous style imaginable towards rendering the petted heir happy in his own way, and there was only one moment at which any thing seemed to cast a shadow of doubt upon the perfect success of the plan laid by Miss Thorwold for her second espousals.

Colonel Dermont upon one occasion, when the time of his approaching happiness was made the subject of family discussion, ventured to say that he should rather prefer delaying the happy ceremony, till his son was of age.

The eager Alfred instantly exclaimed, "Oh, father!" in an accent of earnest remonstrance, but in the next moment, he felt, despite all the ardour of his love, that there was nothing unreasonable in this, Alfred notwithstanding all the spoiling process he had gone through, was always sufficiently generous to confess himself wrong, when he believed he was so, and now he was on the very verge of saying that perhaps his father was

right, when he caught a glance from the eye of Amelia, which rendered such a concession ten thousand times over impossible.

This glance was, in fact, a master-piece in its way, and probably could only have been inspired in such high perfection by the great importance of the object it had to obtain.

It *was* important for Miss Thorwold that she should be married again immediately, and oh ! how well her eyes pleaded for it ! No lips ever pronounced words more distinctly than her eyes now said, “ Can you, my Alfred—can you indeed endure this terrible delay ? ” and springing from his seat, as if all the self-willed impetuosity which had been so long nurtured in him, was just at that very moment ripened to perfection, he attacked the quickly-discomfited colonel with such a torrent of enamoured reasonings and passionate entreaties that the worthy gentleman shook his head as if he had been exposed to the pelting of a hail-storm ; but the moment he could recover his self-possession, he replied with his accustomed obedience to all the

darling boy's behests, "That Alfred should name the day himself."

"To-morrow then!" exclaimed the happy lover, bending his knee upon the foot-stool of Amelia, "to-morrow! oh, let it be to-morrow, sweetest."

And the look which the fair creature cast down upon him in return, was not at all likely to moderate the ardour with which he now seriously began to plead for the immediate solemnisation of the ceremony which was to make him the happiest of men.

"But, my dear love," said his mother, without a thought of contradicting him on any other grounds, "what will our dear Amelia do about her wedding-clothes?—she cannot be married in mourning, dearest, can she?"

"Nobody cares so little for dress as I do," said Amelia, in a gentle murmur. "When my heart is concerned I think of nothing else."

"Oh, let her wear the very same gown that I first saw her in!" exclaimed the enamoured youth. "And then let her give it to me to

keep for ever, and for ever, and for ever! And when I die let it lie upon my bosom, and be buried with me!"

Amelia smiled, and looked at Mrs. Dermont as if she expected that she would be so good as to answer for her.

"To be sure they are, both of them, as heartily in love, as ever two young creatures were," said Colonel Dermont, laughing. "However, though I don't mean to interfere at all about the dresses, and though I think my son Alfred quite right in not making any difficulties on that score, I must get you to remember, my dear children, that my Lord Ripley is not very likely to approve his niece's being married without settlements. You all know that his consent to the marriage has been given in the very handsomest manner possible, but that was when I proposed a proper settlement to be made upon you, by a rent charge on the estate, my dear. And I can't say I should like to write to him again now, to invite him to the wedding, with a P.S. purporting that I hope he will be so good

as not to mind there being no settlement at all, because there was no time for it. I don't think it would be pleasant to do that, Alfred, do you?"

"Could not the settlements be signed afterwards, sir?" said Alfred, looking again to the eyes of Amelia for sympathetic eagerness.

But now it happened that he could not catch her eye, for she was working him a pair of slippers, and appeared at that moment to be engaged on the most intricate part of the pattern. Alfred had therefore to fight for the postponed settlement alone; and for a little while he did it manfully. But at length his father assumed a graver air, and stopped short the flow of his eloquence by saying, "Are you aware, my dear Alfred, that in case you should die (and we are all liable to this, at any moment, you know), in case you should die between the time of your marriage, and that at which these parchments can be made ready, this lady will be left totally unprovided for? Are you aware of this?"

"No, certainly, I am not," replied Alfred.

"Neither can I be made aware of it now, father. Would not Amelia be left in your hands? And can I then have any fear of her being kindly treated?"

"I thank you, my son, for your confidence in me," replied the colonel, with still increasing gravity. "But, believe me, on such a point it is your duty to trust to no man." This tone effectually sobered Alfred, and he remained silent, though evidently very far from satisfied.

Nothing could be more sweetly graceful than the manner in which Amelia rose from her chair at this rather embarrassing moment, and gently approaching her intended father-in-law, laid her hand upon his shoulder, and said, "My dear, dear colonel! not for my sake let there be for a moment any coolness or misunderstanding between you and my dear Alfred. Forgive his opposition, forgive it for my sake! And let me make peace between you by coaxing him to withdraw it."

And then, playfully gliding towards her lover, she bent her beautiful head upon his

shoulder, and said, "Dearest Alfred! say no more about it. Your dear father means nothing but kindness to us both. And besides, dear friend, you ought to remember that there is a great deal of difference between waiting till you are of age, which will not be, will it, for six dismal long months, and more, and only taking patience till the lawyers have finished their part of the business. Were I you, I really would not sit looking so very unhappy about it, but rouse myself up and write an eloquent epistle to these tedious gentlemen, imploring them, for charity, to make all the haste they can."

Alfred looked at her, of course, with rapture; and so indeed, did the colonel also, and even Mrs. Dermont laid aside some of the wedding-present wool-work she was engaged upon, for the pleasure of looking at her elegant daughter performing the part of peace-maker. Altogether they made a charming group.

And did Julia Drummond make one of it? Not exactly, because she was seated at the

farthest window, and had a book in her hand. Far better would it have been for her ease and comfort had she at that moment been really reading that book, instead of only pretending to do so. She might then have escaped all the disagreeable thoughts which rose, like so many imps, to torment her.

Why was it that she saw, what nobody else did? Were they all wrong, and she alone right in the interpretation of the little scene she had just witnessed? Or were they all right, and she alone wrong. Wrong from the hateful colouring which her secret feeling gave to every thing that passed before her?

This was a question as constantly asked by Julia of herself, and so uniformly left without any satisfactory answer, that it worried her out of all comfort; and at this moment she got so restless under it, that she got up and left the room.

Why did it seem so very evident to her that Amelia was quite as eager as Alfred could possibly be, for the hasty celebration of

their marriage, yet stopping short in her eagerness, exactly at the point at which her interest dictated that she should do so?

The manner in which this detestable question rose again and again before her, was tormenting beyond description, and having paced every walk in the wilderness, now fast, now slow, without encountering any thing of sufficient interest to stifle this odious train of thought, by suggesting a new one, she determined to set off upon a tolerably long walk, to pay a visit which she had been meditating for some days, without having quite sufficient energy of purpose to make it.

Julia was a kind-tempered, charitable little girl, and, considering the very little money of which she had the command, she really did a great deal of good in the neighbourhood. She put two children to school entirely at her own expense, and never received her quarterly allowance, which amounted exactly to seven pounds ten shillings, without setting aside one pound and the odd ten shillings for the purpose of buying something or other for

some of her poor neighbours, who wanted a great many things quite as much as she did herself.

Though this sum in itself was not sufficient to buy a great many golden opinions, the manner in which her little offerings were made, and the thoughtful, tidy, notable way in which she assisted with her own needle to increase the value of her little presents, had greatly endeared her to all the cottagers within the circle of her rambles, and it was to the dwelling of one of these that she was determined to turn her steps in the hope of finding something else to think of, besides the languishing glances of Miss Thorwold, and her skilful watchfulness about her own settlement.

Julia was at no great loss in which direction to turn her steps, for there was hardly a decent cottage in the parish of Stoke, where she was not a familiar visitant; and having called at one or two where there was nothing sufficiently interesting to tempt her to sit down, she turned aside from the broad parish road she had been following into a green

lane, which, though the autumn was far advanced, was still brightly green from the rich undergrowth of oak which bordered the copse through which it passed.

The cottage to which this led was that of a wood-cutter, whose perfectly sylvan residence might have satisfied Robin Hood himself, both from its seclusion and the woodland beauty of the scene which surrounded it. This pretty cottage was the property of the colonel and the bold forrester; or, in more modern phrase, the honest wood-cutter who inhabited it, was one of his yearly labourers. It had been a favourite resort both of Julia and Alfred, from the time they were old enough to walk so far unattended; for the good man always contrived to have the trunk of a tree nicely balanced as a see-saw for the young squire, and within the cottage there was a pretty little girl just two years older than Julia, who was never weary of inventing new sports for her, from the weaving a garland of daisies to the building a house with faggots.

By degrees this little woodland nymph had

grown into a great favourite with Miss Drummond, and having upon sundry occasions been permitted to join in a birthday festival of tea and cakes upon the lawn at the Mount, Mrs. Dermont herself took notice of her. She was then not only sent to school, but particular care was taken that she should be instructed in nice needle-work, so as to qualify her for an upper sort of servant's place when she grew up. The great ambition both of the parents and the little girl herself, very naturally, was that she should, in process of time, find service at the Mount; but accident was against her. About a year before she could be considered as old enough for the place, the upper-housemaid married, and her loss was supplied by a young woman whose conduct was too well approved to leave any hope of her being discharged to make room for another.

It this dilemma it came into the careful head of Mrs. Jenkins, the wood-cutter's wife, that Miss Drummond, now that the governess was gone, must be big enough to want a maid

of her own, and accordingly she presented herself one morning before the colonel and his lady, in order to mention, that if any such want existed, her daughter Susan, who was as good a girl as ever lived, &c. &c. &c., would be "ready and willing to take the place, and do all that in her lay to give satisfaction."

It was Mrs. Dermont who, when such applications were made in the library instead of the housekeeper's room, was, in ordinary cases, the person to reply; but upon this occasion it was the colonel.

"I beg your pardon, my dear," said he, "for interfering with what, in general, is certainly not my business, and I would not do it now if John Jenkins's wife were a person to get a simple 'yes,' or 'no,' when her eldest child was seeking service at the Mount. But I can't let that be, after John has been such a good and faithful servant for so many years; and therefore, my good Mrs. Jenkins, I will tell you myself the reason why it is quite impossible that your Susan should come here as

waiting-maid to Miss Drummond. The reason is, Mrs. Jenkins, that Miss Drummond cannot by any means have a waiting-maid just at present. I have very particular reasons of my own for saying this. I shall have no objection whatever, quite the contrary I am sure, if in two years from the present time, Miss Drummond, who will then be seventeen, and her own mistress, should like to take your daughter Susan for her personal attendant, but till then, Mrs. Dermont means to be so kind as to go on as she has always done, letting her own maid do all that is wanted for the young lady."

This was said with great kindness, and indeed with a flattering air of confidential familiarity. Nevertheless, little Julia, who was present, saw that the good woman's eyes filled with tears, and that though she courtesied low, and thanked his honour for all his goodness to her and hers, she was deeply disappointed.

Julia herself might have been deeply disappointed too, had any such grand idea as

having a maid of her own, ever entered her head. But now as far as she was herself concerned, she could only rejoice at the idea that such dignity was in store for her for the future, and as she gave the disappointed petitioner a friendly farewell nod, she promised her in her heart, that if indeed, the day should come when she herself should have such patronage to bestow, Susan Jenkins should be the object of it, and no other.

And Julia failed not to say this to Susan herself at the very first opportunity, and the assurance was received with as much gratitude as if the promised benefit was to be bestowed immediately. But poor Susan could not wait for it without doing something to maintain herself in the interval. For John Jenkins and his good wife had a very numerous progeny, and Susan being rather more fit than most girls of seventeen to go into service, could not of course waste her time by remaining at home. So, after spending a month or two in vainly seeking a place in the neighbourhood, the poor girl had been at

length consigned to an aunt in London, who consented to undertake the task of finding a place for her.

A girl brought up as Susan had been, in the country, was not very likely to find herself comfortable in any first experiment of a London service, and the consequence was, that she had changed her place, greatly to her parents' dissatisfaction, more than once.

Julia had never omitted to make inquiries about her, and to send such friendly messages from time to time, as sufficed to keep up their youthful feelings of mutual attachment; and it was to make her usual inquiry for this young woman, that Julia bent her steps towards the copse. Having passed the lane, and entered upon the pretty bit of cleared ground at the end of it, the first object which met her eye was her old friend Susan herself, carrying one little sister in her arms, and having two others hanging upon her apron. The poor girl was looking, as she always did, exceedingly neat, but she was pale, thin, and sadly out of spirits.

When the first greetings were over, and Susan's astonishment at the growth and improved appearance of the young lady, all of which was quite genuine, duly expressed, the eldest of her two attendant sisters was intrusted with the task of carrying the baby into the house, and the other dismissed with the words, "Go to mother, dear, that's a good girl," and then the poor girl pointed to the trunk of a tree, which occupied the spot formerly sacred to the see-saw, and asked Julia if she would "condescend to sit down there and rest herself?"

"Willingly, Susan, if you will come and sit beside me," replied the young lady; "but I should like to return some of the fine compliments you have been making me, if I could; but I really cannot. You don't look well at all. What is the matter with you, Susan?"

"Nothing, I believe, Miss Julia; nothing that I know of is the matter with me in the way of health; and, if I look ill, it is only because I have been fretting. Oh, Miss

Julia, I am so afraid that father and mother blame me for leaving my place, and coming straight home again without waiting in that wicked London any longer to look for a new one. I would rather get my living by working in the fields a hundred thousand times over, Miss Julia, than remain there to see and hear what I have seen and heard."

"But, surely, Susan, if you have been unlucky enough to fall into the company of bad people, your parents cannot blame you for coming away?"

"They don't blame me, Miss Julia, for leaving the bad people, but they say, poor souls, that they have neither house-room nor meat either to spare, and therefore it would have been better for us all, if, when I left my place, I had stopped to look out for another, instead of coming down home at once."

"Why there does seem sense in that, Susan," replied Julia, gently, "unless you had some particular reason for wanting to leave London altogether."

"I had no other reason but the hating it,

Miss Julia, and perhaps I might not have thought it right to listen to that if—”

“If what, Susan?”

“Why if it had not been so very near to the time of your being seventeen, Miss Julia.”

Julia coloured, but she smiled too.

“Do you remember that, Susan? I remember it quite well, too. My birthday is in November, and we have got to the middle of October already.”

“And, if the colonel was to keep in the same mind, Miss Julia, do you think you could put up with a maid to tend upon you who has had so little practice, for I have never had a lady’s-maid’s place yet? That place that I came from last, and which was too wicked for me to think of without terror and shame too: in that place, for the matter of a week or two I was the only maid that a beautiful lady that lodged there had to wait upon her; and again and again, Miss Julia, when I was brushing her beautiful long hair,

I used to please myself by thinking that it was good practice for me against coming to wait upon you."

"Oh, if that were all the difficulty, Susan," replied Julia, laughing, "I dare say we should get on very well, for I generally dress myself almost entirely. But my guardian has never said a word to me since about having a maid of my own, so I can't feel quite certain that he was in earnest; but I hope, Susan, that your mother is not really angry with you for coming home; is she?"

"Oh dear no, Miss Julia. Mother is a great deal too kind and good for that; and so is father too. But they seem to think that I was in too great a hurry; but indeed I was not; and I only wish I had not stayed quite so long, for I hate to think of such wickedness."

"Was the beautiful young lady you waited upon, one of the wicked people, Susan?"

"She was not a young lady all the time,"

replied the girl, "for she was married while I was in the house."

"But was she one of the wicked people, Susan?" said Julia.

"No, Miss Julia, I hope not. I did not like her very much, certainly, because she was cross and fretful-like, and hard to please, but I don't know any thing very bad of her, and, if I am not greatly mistaken, she has been sadly deceived already by them that ought to have been ashamed of themselves for their base conduct. But you must not even ask me to talk about these dreadful people, Miss Julia, for it is next to impossible I could do so without saying what it is not fit that you should hear. Oh! if I can but come to live with you, Miss Julia, I shall forget it all, and grow again to be as innocent a girl as ever I was; but I do not believe that any girl can be sent to London as I was, to get a place wherever I happened to find one, without seeing and hearing more than is good for them. Will you be so very kind as to ask the colonel about it, Miss Julia?"

“You may depend upon it I shall not forget it, my dear Susan, and you shall hear from me as soon as I have got his answer,” was Julia’s hopeful reply.

CHAPTER II.

THE visit of Julia to her old friend Susan had, in some degree, produced the desired effect—that is to say, Julia on her way home did disengage her thoughts *in some degree* from the subject which so painfully and uselessly engrossed them, leading her to give not above nine minutes out of every ten to meditation on the approaching marriage of Alfred, while, during the remainder of the time she was thinking of poor Susan, and turning in her mind the best and least presumptuous way of recalling her and her wishes, to the memory of her guardian and Mrs. Dermont.

The sight of the house, however, and the

recollection of all that was going on within it; the vague but strong persuasion which possessed her, that Miss Thorwold felt no real attachment to Alfred, and that he, with all his noble qualities, his generous and confiding nature, and his devoted love, was about to chain himself for life to a woman who married him only for the sake of his estate—all rushed back upon her heart with a feeling of renewed misery, and a sigh that she would willingly have permitted to carry her life with it, burst from her bosom.

“ Oh ! were it but possible that I could help him,” thought she ; “ but there, there is the misery. It is *impossible* !”

On entering the drawing-room she found Miss Thorwold surrounded by the colonel, his lady, and Alfred. She was sitting near a writing-table, with an open note in her hand, while the trio above-mentioned were evidently in the act of holding counsel with her on the contents of it.

“ Oh ! here is our dear Julia !” exclaimed Alfred ; “ she must help to persuade you, my

Amelia, not to commit the cruelty of running away from us at a moment when your presence is so necessary to enable me to bear patiently the torturing delay of the lawyers. Mrs. Knight wants to take her away from us, Julia! Tell her that it is her duty to stay."

Amelia had, immediately on her return to the Mount, apologised in the most penitent style to Julia for the little warmth of temper which she had shown at a moment when her mind was harassed by doubts whether her ambitious uncle, Lord Ripley, would sanction the attachment she had formed. This apology, and all the coaxing series of civilities which had followed, increased the discomfort of Julia in no small degree; but there was no help for it, and she had to submit to a vast deal of seeming affection, and even to occasional caresses, which greatly added to the sum of her daily suffering.

"Let me state the case," said the affianced bride of poor Alfred. "I will not suffer our dear Julia to be prejudiced. Here is a letter

from Mrs. Knight, Miss Drummond, inviting me to return to Crosby. Ought I to refuse or accept it?" And as she spoke, she playfully pressed a stick of sealing-wax upon the lips of Alfred, in token that he was not to speak.

Well, full well did the wily Amelia know that Julia would rather sink at her feet than raise her voice to counsel her departure. Well did she know that the poor girl loved her former playfellow with a tenderness that she would die rather than reveal, and a perfection of devotion which would make her endure any martyrdom, rather than give him pain. Safely, therefore, did she refer to her a question, the answer to which she felt to be of immense importance to her in her terribly critical situation, although she knew that the answer she wished for was, in every way, precisely what it would be most painful to her to give.

"Think how long I have been away from this dear old friend! Must I yield to all this dear flattering importunity? or must I per-

form the stern commands of duty, and run away? Tell me, Julia?" said she.

Julia coloured a little at this reference, and the more because she felt that the eye of Alfred was upon her. She replied, however, without any outward symptom of discomposure,

"We cannot but suppose, Miss Thorwold, that your friend, Mrs. Knight, would be the first to insist upon a negative to her own request, did she know that you could only be led to her by the stern commands of duty."

This answer caused Alfred to knit his brows—but they were instantly smoothed again by Miss Thorwold's saying with clever readiness,

"Oh! how well you know her, my dear Julia! She would indeed! I was determined that you should decide the point, and you have done it. Dear, kind Mrs. Knight! She would never forgive me did she know that I could for a moment fancy she could wish me to come to her, under such circumstances. Ah! dearest Mrs. Dermont! she knows not

as yet how completely you have made me your thrall ! Now then for my answer. I shall no longer find it difficult !”

And the fair creature, looking up at poor Julia with a smile of blended *naïveté* and sweetness, drew the writing materials towards her, and set about telling her dear Mrs. Knight that to leave the Mount at this moment was impossible.

Great, indeed, was the averseness of Amelia at this moment to the idea of any prolonged tête-à-tête with her confidential and acute friend Mrs. Knight. It was not quite impossible, indeed, that she might have told her ALL, without encountering any very severe opposition to her present plans—and Amelia was very capable of guessing this. Nevertheless, she greatly preferred burying *that all*, or as much of it as possible, in perpetual oblivion, and the carefully avoiding all security on the part of Mrs. Knight, was just now the most obvious way of effecting this.

“ And here are more letters, Julia !” said

Mrs. Dermont, who now that she was relieved from all dread of seeing her son dying of a broken heart, remembered that there was one addressed to herself, which she had laid unopened upon the table.

“Here is one to you and one to me, my dear, from Mrs. Stephens; so let us see what they are about, for the servant is waiting.”

Julia guessed the purport of her note before she opened it.

From the time Mr. and Mrs. Stephens had met the party assembled for the pleasure of poor Alfred at the Mount, their ideas of their own consequence in the county had very considerably increased. Mrs. Knight was almost the only lady in the neighbourhood who had a winter residence in London; and this circumstance, together with her frequently receiving titled guests, and wearing moreover a greater variety of new bonnets than any body else in the whole county, gave her a pre-eminence in the estimation of most of her acquaintance, which rendered the being invited to stay in

the house with her, a very flattering compliment indeed.

Neither was it possible that such highly intelligent people as Mr. and Mrs. Stephens could remain ignorant of the high and long-descended consideration in which Mrs. Verepoint and her young heiress were held; and the meeting this young lady, under circumstances leading to such familiar intercourse, was very nearly equally agreeable. As to Mr. Marsh, too, and his charming sister, if his mental superiority, and her ingratiating vivacity, had not, respectively, brought their own recommendation, the seeing them selected to make part of such a peculiarly select and distinguished society, was quite enough to prove that it was no bad compliment to be invited to meet them.

In short, from the period of this "gathering" at the Mount, Mr. Stephens and his lady had often laid aside some of their transatlantic, philosophical, unitarian lucubrations, for the purpose of discussing the best way of

keeping up an intimate intercourse with their most distinguished county neighbours.

“Mrs. Knight and her set—the Verepoints, the Marshes, the Dermonts, and ourselves, Liebe,” said Mrs. Stephens, at the close of one of those interesting conversations, “are evidently the knot that ought to keep together, and become more closely united with every passing year.”

It was not in the nature of Mr. Stephens to differ from his Arabella on any point on which she had decidedly expressed an opinion—and if she had thought proper to include her majesty the Queen in the set that ought to hang particularly together, having themselves for its centre, he would never have uttered a dissentient word.

Since the *al fresco* fête at the Mount, and the one which quickly followed it at Crosby, Mr. and Mrs. Stephens had both, in their respective hearts, abandoned the notion of giving any thing of the same kind in their grounds at Beech Hill ; but they had

said nothing about it even to each other, the subject had been permitted to drop, and there was an end of it. Not the less, however, were they both determined to do something. The change in the Overby garrison, and the startling rank of three of the newly-arrived officers, made it especially necessary that this something should be in first-rate style, but the what, and the how, kept them long in suspense. At one time they thought of a dance in their newly-decorated dining-room, with tea and cards in the drawing-room, refreshments, such as lemonade, negus, and cakes, in the footman's pantry, and a standing supper in the two best bed-rooms. But an accurate measurement of the premises, led at last, to the abandonment of the scheme, for which Mrs. Stephens apologised to her friend Celestina, who had been driven half wild with joy at the idea of such an opportunity of being introduced to all the new officers at once, by saying that she felt that in her situation she owed it to herself, and to what was more, infinitely more precious still, not

to over-exert herself. Seeing, however, the look of dreadful agony with which her charming young friend received this announcement, and fearing that her feelings might bring on one of the terrible nervous attacks to which she was subject, she began in a most amiable manner to descant upon the superior advantages likely to arise from a plan of proceedings which, though it excluded the ball, and the pleasant standing supper in the bedrooms, was likely to lead to the most important and beneficial results.

“It was on your account entirely, my dear, that I wished to give this ball, as I well know the delight of a dance to a young girl like you, Celestina. A delight, by the way, which, I promise you, we young married women can share when we have no conscientious reasons to check us. But ah, my dear Celestina! after all there is no happiness that can be compared to that given and received by conjugal love! It is on this, my dear, that your young heart should fix itself. It is to this

that all your wishes, all your endeavours should tend and concentrate themselves."

If it were the object of Mrs. Stephens to save her fair friend from a fainting fit, by the thrilling effect of these electric words, she showed great judgment, for every symptom of the kind vanished immediately; it is highly probable that she might anticipate this; but nevertheless, she was a good deal startled by the indignant burst which followed.

"And don't I fix my heart on it, Mrs. Stephens? Heavens and earth! What can you mean by saying that in the way of a reproof? Do I deserve it, Mrs. Stephens? Don't all my wishes and all my endeavours tend to that?"

And here a violent burst of tears, which seemed to avenge the lost ball and the unjust reproaches all in one, came to her relief, nor did her sobbings cease, till Mrs. Stephens hinted plainly, that she feared the sight of such vehement agitation might produce the

most dangerous effects ,upon herself, and that if her beloved Celestina could not compose herself, it would be better for both their sakes that they should part. And now again, the eloquence of Mrs. Stephens was effectual; for Celestina would rather have been reproached from morning to night for not being sufficiently anxious to marry, than have left Beech Hill for Locklow Wood. For not only had she a sympathising friend at Beech Hill to whom she could open her heart, and a good many more nice things to eat, but if nobody else came in her way, she did contrive now and then to get something like a little flirtation from Mr. Stephens, who very often, if his lady was not in presence, would testify his kind feelings to her friend, by sundry little gallantries, which escaped him, as it were, by the mere force of habit, whereas at Locklow Wood, the only variety she had from seeing her brother read from morning till night, was by receiving from him in the most provoking manner every species of kindness and attention, *except* that of bringing

officers, or even a stray curate, now and then home to dine with them, which was, in fact, the only species of attention which she had the least pleasure in receiving from him. Affectionate, calm, and even pleasant feelings being thus restored between the two ladies, they fell to talking of the pleasantest style of county visiting, and Mrs. Stephens charmed the heart of her young friend, by saying,

“In fact, my dear, Mrs. Knight’s set, the Verepoints, the Dermonts, you and your brother, and ourselves, ought to make common cause, and contrive, in one way or another, to do something pleasant and amusing, every month of the year.”

“What a divine woman you are!” exclaimed Celestina, warmly, cordially, sincerely, and with her grateful soul beaming from her eyes. “Certainly if there is any condition upon earth which may fairly be said to resemble what religion teaches us to believe of Heaven, it is that of a young married woman like you, scattering happiness

far and near, in every direction! I do think you are more than half an angel already!"

Mrs. Stephens was touched. It was exactly her own idea.

"Charmingly expressed, my dear girl," said she, bending towards her, and impressing a kiss upon her forehead, "and may this fate be speedily your own, my dear."

From this time forward the second thought of Mrs. Stephens—her husband and her little work together naturally constituting her first—was how to make Beech Hill celebrated for its agreeable influence upon the county.

To lodge as many persons, male and female, in it as Mrs. Dermont had done at the Mount was impossible, and the idle thought was dismissed as soon as conceived. But there were various ways of making a house agreeable, even when it does not happen to have so many bed-rooms as the Mount—to have young ladies in the house, and to cultivate an easy sort of intimacy with all the gentlemen out of it, appeared to her as the best device that could be hit upon, and it was in

consequence of this notion that, having before hinted to Julia the having formed the intention of favouring her with an invitation, she now sent it, and it was to this invitation that the attention of Miss Drummond was at present called. The time had been, and not very many months ago, when such a proposal as that of going to spend a "week or ten days" with Mrs. Stephens would have appeared to her as one absolutely impossible to accept, "on account of its being so *very* disagreeable." For then, every day in which Alfred had not shared in her readings, her walkings, and her talkings, would have been a day from which all joy and gladness would seem to have been excluded. But now the case was different, and the idea of getting away appeared like a release from suffering.

"Well, my dear, what do you say to this invitation? It is abundantly civil, certainly."

And Mrs. Dermont looked as if she thought Beech Hill had taken a startling liberty with the Mount.

"If you have no objection, ma'am," replied Julia, "I should like to go."

"No, if you wish it, Julia, I certainly do not see any particular objection. It is meant, I suppose, as a return for our asking them here. It is from Beech Hill, colonel, asking Julia to stay there for a week or ten days. Do you see any objection, as she seems to like it?"

"Oh! I am so glad you like that Mrs. Stephens, my dear Julia!" exclaimed Miss Thorwold, before the deliberating colonel could find time to reply. "There is a great deal of talent about her, and I should greatly like to see more of her.. I think you are *so* right for wishing to go."

These words were well timed, and well calculated to produce the effect intended by the lovely speaker. Next to her nervously eager wish for the earliest possible celebration of the marriage ceremony between herself and Alfred, Amelia's most earnest desire at that time was to get rid of Julia. There was something in the meditative depth of her

dark eye which harassed her, she knew not why. It was not that she could fear one so very nearly a child; that was impossible; and she knew, oh! she well knew, that one word from herself, breathed into the ear of Alfred would suffice to overthrow and obliterate all and every thing little Julia Drummond could say to him; even could the love-lorn little soul take courage and talk to him from morning to night, a contingency which she also knew to be impossible; for it was evident, at least to her keenly observant eyes, that Julia carefully avoided all occasions of conversing with him. Yet, nevertheless, she heartily wished her to be where those tiresome eyes could neither see nor be seen.

Had Amelia not made this little speech, however, it is highly probable that the colonel might have said in his very gentle, kind, and civil way, that he did not see any very good reason why she could go to stay at the house of Mr. Stephens, and therefore that it would be quite as well perhaps to decline it. But he would as soon have thought

of applying his cane to the shoulders of his son, as of making such an observation after what Miss Thorwold had uttered, and therefore when Julia looked in his face for the fiat which was to decide her proceedings, she received a smile and a nod, which settled the matter at once, and Julia wrote a very civil little note, accepting the invitation, and promising to arrive at Beech Hill by dinner-time on the next day but one.

The interests of Susan, however, were not forgotten in the interval. While Alfred and Amelia were indulging in a tête-à-tête ramble in the wilderness, she opened to both her guardian and his lady, the state of the affair, assuring them both, very earnestly, that she certainly did not want a maid to wait upon her the least in the world, but only, as the colonel had said it was to be so, poor Susan had never forgotten it, and certainly, if she did have any maid at all, she would much rather it should be Susan than any body else.

The colonel, to whom the idea of surprising Julia with the information that she was

mistress of ten thousand seven hundred pounds, safely placed at three and a half per cent., had long been a source of very agreeable anticipation, smiled upon her with a great deal of affectionate good humour, and said,

“ We will explain to you all about it, my dear, the very day that you come to be seventeen, and there is but a week or two wanting of it now, Julia, and then you will see, my dear child, that I have never forgotten whose arm it was that came between my head and the sabre that was raised to cut it off. I have done all I could, my dear, and I would have done more still if I had known how. However, it is all very snug and comfortable, and clear, as you will find ; and though I suppose most people would think that your having a maid for the future was rather more than was necessary, Mrs. Dermont likes it as well as I do, in order that you may at once feel the comfort and profit of having had a tolerably good guardian. But seventeen is quite early enough to be of age, Julia, and I

won't do any thing irregular in any way, and that prevents my telling you that you may have Susan Jenkins into the house directly, but you have my leave, and Mrs. Dermont's leave too, my dear, to tell her that she may hold herself engaged to come on the 15th of next month."

Julia thanked them both very sweetly for their kindness, and set off forthwith upon another solitary walk to the copse to carry the good news to Susan. Poor Julia! How deep, how very deep was the wound which disappointment had made in her young heart! The autumn sun shone and many a gay bird was still singing amidst the russet boughs, and the nature of Julia was not so completely changed as to make her unconscious of this; but now, the only effect which it produced on her was to fill her eyes with tears.

CHAPTER III.

It was long since the beautiful Miss Thorwold had felt so nearly easy in mind, as she did now. The passionate adoration of her young lover seemed to increase with every passing hour, and his devoted parents, seeing the unlimited power she evidently held over his happiness, seemed to look upon her as a being of more than mere human importance. She had no cause to fear any observations of theirs. Alfred had thrown over her the glittering armour of his love, which was in their eyes a sort of holy panoply which it would have been little short of sacrilege to touch. To the repeated letters of the impatient young man, the lawyers had vouchsafed the

most satisfactory answers, stating that the property was of a nature to render the business remarkably simple, and that all the necessary deeds would be forwarded forthwith. From Lord and Lady Ripley she had the most agreeable letters imaginable, in which these affectionate relatives expressed the greatest satisfaction at her happy prospects—promising that the fond uncle would take care to be at the house of Mrs. Knight at the time of the marriage, that he might have the happiness of giving her away, and that the generous aunt would take care to contribute to her *corbeille de mariage*, as soon as she was well enough to go shopping. Even the great bugbear of her existence, her debts, her ever-threatening, ever-present debts, seemed now to be scarcely terrible at all; for did her creditors hold off their urgent claims till she were actually married, and of this her excellent friend Mrs. Stedworth gave her great hopes, she felt such a happy degree of confidence in her influence over her future husband, as to make the paying them *then* a

matter of very little consequence indeed. Nay, even should the unfeeling brutes, her creditors, trouble her during the short interval which still remained before her marriage, she felt little doubt—*very* little doubt—that she could induce her lover to bring forward the necessary sum, without its causing the least diminution of his ardent wish to receive the blessing of her hand.

In short, when Julia for the first time in her life left the Mount to make an independent visit as a grown-up young lady, she left as happy a party as possible. The colonel and his wife, looking at the beautiful young couple, who reclined upon the sofas, weaving delightful plans for the future, or glided over the lawns, and through the shrubberies like blest spirits in Paradise, as the fulfilment and embodying of all the hopes and all the wishes they had ever formed; while the beautiful couple themselves, looked back again at them with a fulness of contentment which it was a pleasure to behold. Julia saw all this very plainly when she bade them farewell, and

perhaps she may be forgiven, all the circumstances of the case considered, though she heaved a sigh as she thought how very little her presence was needed in the only home she had ever known.

* * * *

At Beech Hill the scene was a very different one. She was immediately converted into a young lady of great consequence, and, better still, she found that Charlotte Verepoint was also a guest there. A feeling which was perhaps 'cousin-germaine to that which would have made Colonel Dermont decline the invitation to his ward, had his intended daughter-in-law not favoured it, had also made the lady of the Grange look a little stiff when a similar invitation to her daughter was communicated to her; but she too, was stopped, ere she gave expression to it, for looking in the face of Charlotte she saw, as of late she had often done, that she looked both heavy-eyed and pale, and therefore, instead of any thing less civil, she said, "I don't quite know, Charlotte, why these quite new people should

be so very out-of-the-common-way civil, as to ask you to stay with them, but as far as I am concerned, my dear, I have not the slightest objection to your accepting it, if you think it will amuse you. What do you say to it, Charlotte? You know that you need not stay an hour longer than you like. And upon my word, I think you would be at a loss what to say civilly, by way of an excuse."

"If you have no objection, mamma," replied Charlotte, slightly colouring, "I should prefer going. And if I do not like it when I get there, I will write to you to send the carriage for me. I dare say Sophy will be able to find means of sending it."

The circumstance of Miss Verepoint's being one of the party was a great pleasure to Julia. Of all the ladies in the neighbourhood she was the only one who had ever seemed to think the little orphan much worthy of notice. Had she been strikingly beautiful as a child it might have been otherwise. Nay, even had some touching story of pitiable dependence been attached to her, she might

have appeared more interesting, but being neither handsome nor ugly, rich nor poor, high-born nor a beggar-girl, belonging to nobody, interesting to nobody, it was not very surprising that nobody had taken much notice of her. Charlotte Verepoint, however, had always been an exception to this natural state of things. The difference in their ages, however, had hitherto prevented every thing like the companionship of equality between them, Julia having till very lately retained so completely the appearance of a child, that the perfectly grown up, and highly-finished Miss Verepoint could only "take a good deal of notice of her," the intimacy of equal friendship was yet to come. And there now seemed an excellent chance that it would come. Neither of them had at this moment the happy flow of young animal spirits which makes every new scene delightful, and both were surrounded by people whom they thought particularly disagreeable, and by a general aspect of domestic arrangement, sufficiently unlike what they had been used to see, to make them feel

themselves not only in a new, but a strange land.

I am not such a novice as not to know that two young ladies, both of them having sufficient beauty, and sufficient unhappiness, to be considered in some degree as heroines, ought never, under any circumstances to suffer the goodness of their hearts, and the exquisite perfection of their high-breeding, and exalted tone of character, to be tarnished and defaced by giving way to the contemptible temptation of quizzing. But unfortunately, both my young ladies, notwithstanding all their sorrows—and both had suffered—were neither of them free from that ensnaring faculty, a strong sense of the ridiculous, and, truth obliges me to confess that, despite the sorrow and the sadness which were most certainly at the heart of each, their first approach to a thorough mutual good understanding, was made by each becoming aware that the other was undergoing a merry martyrdom, from forcing her features to retain a vigorous gravity, while longing to indulge in a laugh.

Mrs. Stephens was certainly at that moment vehemently beset by the danger of a too perfect and overflowing self-satisfaction. She was, as we know, a young married woman—in the most interesting of all situations. She had generously blessed the man of her choice with her heart, her hand, and all her money ! And these claims upon his affection were answered, as her heart assured her, by such a passionate devotion on his part, as placed her among the happy few whose existence bore all the glowing raptures of romance, and all the sober certainty of real bliss into the bargain. This was much ; but it was not all. She possessed, in addition, the ineffable satisfaction of knowing that she had, by the mere force of intellect, converted an ordained Christian priest, into a Socinian philosopher ; and, to crown all, she had now “filled her house” with beauties and heiresses, all of them well born, and all of them from decidedly the most distinguished class of county aristocracy ; while, to render the scene of her festive hos-

pitalities perfect, there was at this most auspicious moment a party of military at the neighbouring town, with all the officers unmarried, and the majority of them, as Fame declared, very nearly allied to nobility.

When Mrs. Stephens met her three young ladies in her pea-green calico-furnished drawing-room, all dressed for dinner, and knew in her heart that three single men, one being George Marsh, and the other two "honourable" military Misters, were coming to dine with them, her bosom heaved with the conscious powers of patronising. She felt that nothing *was* so delightful as being a young married woman with a house full of gay company.

"How charmingly you look, my dear girls, all of you! Our little Overby will speedily become, if I mistake not, the favourite quarters of the military. In fact, you know, when men of high family are quartered in a county town, it becomes a positive duty in the county families to notice them. But it must

be a dreadful bore to do it, unless there happen to be some nice girls in the neighbourhood."

Charlotte and Julia involuntarily exchanged a glance. Celestina, whose arm was entwined in that of her young married friend, gave her a fond squeeze.

"May I inquire, Mrs. Stephens," said Miss Verepoint, "which of our military neighbours are coming here to-day?"

"I have taken care, my dear, that your favourite beau shall be one of them," replied the festive matron with a familiar nod. "We have got the Honourable Mr. Foster, who every one gives to you, and the Honourable Mr. Ford, whom many suspect of having a liking HERE." And Mrs. Stephens playfully pulled (but not so as to derange it) one of Celestina's stout ringlets. We should have asked Borrowdale, for our dining-table holds ten, quite as well as it does eight, but he is gone away. Whether for good or not nobody seems to know. Some people do say that it was the learning Miss Thorwold's en-

gagement to Alfred Dermont which sent him off. Perhaps you can tell us something about that, Miss Drummond? It is pretty certain I believe, that he did fall desperately in love with her. And I dare say you can tell us now, whether it came to a proposal or not?"

"If it did," replied Julia, "I never heard of it."

"But it may have been the case, for all that. Miss Thorwold is so excessively admired, that I dare say she never passes a month without receiving a proposal from somebody or other. Some girls mention those things, and some don't, you know. I, for one, was always uncommonly close."

Then, dropping the clinging arm of her particular friend, she turned herself full upon Miss Verepoint, and placing a hand upon each of her shoulders, she said, "I strongly suspect, my dear, that you are a little in my way in that matter. I would bet half-a-crown to a pin, that when a gentleman is sweet upon you, you contrive to keep it a pretty close secret from mamma—eh, Charlotte? You

must let me call you Charlotte now, my dear; and you, too, dear, you must be plain Julia, or pretty Julia now, it must be, I suppose, for every body says that you have suddenly shot up into a beauty. But what I mean is, that I must call you all by your Christian names, for there is nothing on earth so detestable as filling one's house in the country, and then not being intimate. But here come the officers. Your brother is late, Celestina."

Of the two young men who were now ushered into the room by Mrs. Stephens's page, or second footman—for both titles were occasionally given him by his master and mistress—of these two young men, one was the very well-looking, intelligent, gentleman-like sort of personage who has been already alluded to as the son of an old friend of Mrs. Verepoint's, and the other a youth who resembled him in no way, excepting that he, too, had the advantage of a titled father. This Honourable Mr. Ford was just eighteen, rather short, very thin, with red hair and

white eye-lashes, and a general air of silliness in all he said, and all he did, which even his regimentals—for he never put off his regimentals if he could help it—could not always redeem from young-lady neglect, except in cases where the minds of the young ladies were sufficiently developed to render his prefix of “honourable” a plume wide-spreading and graceful enough to overshadow every defect. Of all the new gentlemen, it was this one in particular upon which the buoyant-spirited Celestina had now fixed her hopes and her wishes—and it was long since she had attacked any young gentleman with equal success. Mrs. Stephens’s affectionate sympathy had been, as she gratefully acknowledged, of immense service to her in the progress of this new attachment, for the young man was apt to be a good deal over-looked and forgotten by his brother officers, and the polite attentions of Mr. Stephens, who even without the friendship-taught injunctions of his lady upon the subject, would have felt a strong natural propensity to patronise the

son of a lord, had really contributed a great deal towards making "country quarters" agreeable to the youth, and the consequence was, that the youth, all noble as he was, felt himself extremely well-disposed to accept all the invitations, whether general, "to come in of an evening whenever he liked;" or, as in the present instance, "to meet a party at dinner," which emanated from Beech Hill.

The natural consequence of which was, a most delightful degree of intimacy with the Honourable Mr. Ford.

He danced the Highland reel, too, for he was a Scotchman, and could not possibly do less in return for all the hospitality he received, than offer to teach the young lady staying there his favourite steps.

Perhaps of all the morning occupations in the world, Celestina best liked the practising difficult steps with a young gentleman. She was never tired—no, never! Nor was Mrs. Stephens ever tired of playing. It was, as she said, exactly the sort of thing for a young married woman in her situation to delight in.

In an easy chair, brought to a proper height by sofa-cushions, and her footstool always assiduously placed at her feet by the honourable lieutenant himself, how was it possible that she could do any thing "safer" than play reels to that dear boy and girl? No, she assured her "Liebe" that she had never felt so well since she married, and she only hoped that the being who was dearer to them than themselves, would inherit the taste for music and the dance, which enabled her to pass the lingering hours of expectation so delightfully!

Soon after these pleasant morning pastimes had been established, the Honourable Mr. Ford took such very persevering pains to drill Miss Celestina into the perfection of the Highland fling, that she could not help thinking there was something very particular in his manner; and with a degree of confidence well suited to the tender friendship which united her to her dear young married friend, she mentioned one or two circumstances, in which the perfectly unnecessary

squeezing of her hand made a principal feature, and having done so, desired her, without restraint or scruple, to give her the advantage of her experience, and tell her what she thought of it. Mrs. Stephens answered this appeal in the manner it deserved—that is to say, with equal frankness and good sense.

“My dearest Celestina,” she said, “it is impossible for any married woman, who has already passed through all the agitating ordeal that precedes the life-long union with the man beloved, not to perceive that Ford is becoming passionately fond of you.”

“You really think so, my dearest friend?” said Celestina—“dearest and best,” she added, tenderly impressing a kiss upon her forehead; “you really think so?”

“I do indeed, my love,” was the reply.

“Then, my darling Mrs. Stephens, I will not pretend to deny that I do begin to think so myself. But alas! dearest! I cannot help thinking, too, that he is a year or two younger than I am!”

"Nonsense, child!" returned Mrs. Stephens, in a tone of most welcome indignation—which was indeed quite sincere, for Mrs. Stephens herself was a good dozen years older than her "Liebe," "nonsense, child! Who ever heard of people falling in love according to the church register? I tell you that Ford evidently likes you, Celestina; and I shall be positively angry, I promise you, if you let any absurd speculations about his youth destroy all that I have been doing for your advantage."

"Oh! do not suppose me such an ungrateful wretch!" exclaimed Celestina, with great feeling. "I should deserve never again to speak to, never again to see, a young man, if I could for a moment forget all you have done for me! Besides, dearest, I perfectly agree with you in my heart, though my poor nervous spirits wanted the solace of hearing you say something cheering. But I am perfectly certain you are right in your theory. 'Love, light as air,' you know, and all that beautiful passage, proves it clearly. Besides, my

dearest Mrs. Stephens, who can be so lamentably blinded as to doubt that marriages are made in heaven? I quite adopt your superior views about the Trinity, and all that, but still I must always go on believing that marriages *are* made in heaven. Because it is certainly a fact that men and women from the very beginning of the world were meant to be joined together in matrimony; and my firm believe is, that ALL are intended to be married, and that when they do not, it is only the effect of accident, like a broken leg, or any other misfortune of that sort. And if dear Ford is intended for me by Heaven, I would not be so impious as to prevent it, for any thing that could be offered me! I believe that I do look rather particularly young for my age, which I have told *you*, dearest, though I never told any body else. But my common sense taught me that without it you could never understand things really as they are, and feel the difference it makes when there is no time to be lost; and besides, I feel so

very sure that you will not betray me, that I confessed it without the least scruple."

"Most certainly I shall not betray you, my dear, for I make a principle never to mention the ages of any of the girls that I make friends of. But it is quite childish, Celestina, to talk of your age as you do. A girl at thirty is in the very prime of her youth and beauty; and in my own opinion, no woman knows how to make the most of herself till just about that time."

* * * * *

This conversation had gone far towards confirming all the hopes of Celestina, and stifling all her fears; and the consequence was, that her spirits were in a most delightful state of fermentation. Whenever this was the case, her dress was sure to glow, as it were, with the bright reflection from her heart, and when George Marsh entered the drawing-room at Beech Hill, to join the dinner-party mentioned above, he positively started when his eye first caught sight of her costume. Her robe was of very thin orange-

coloured silk, which, being quite new, and very fully flounced, stuck out in all directions to such an extent, that she seemed almost to fill the room ; and being considerably taller, as well as stouter than the two other young ladies, who where, moreover, clad in white, and in all ways as simply dressed as it was well possible for ladies to be, she really looked like a huge cherry-cheeked figure of wood, set upon a stage to personate a giantess. On her head she had fastened a net veil, embroidered in large flowers by her own fair hands, this hung down behind, sometimes permitted to appear over one shoulder, and sometimes over the other. An immensely full-blown, artificial, cabbage-rose bloomed over her right ear, while just in front of the left sprouted a bunch of bright-blue convolvulus, leaves, tendrils, and blossoms, sportively stretching themselves till they caught the veil at the back of her head, where their playful gambols were trained into usefulness by being made to attach that graceful piece of floating dra-

pery to the redundant hair beneath. Poor George Marsh! It was a great weakness to care so very much about it. But he blushed up to the very top of his high forehead as he looked at her; and then, certainly without intending to do it, he turned his eyes upon Miss Verepoint. It could not have been from any unconscious wish to observe the contrast between the two figures, because his memory rendered the assistance of his eyes on that point quite superfluous—but it might have been done mechanically, perhaps, to see how she bore it.

And ten to one it was, for the same reason, that Miss Verepoint turned her eyes towards him. The eyes just met, and were instantly cast, as by the same movement, on the carpet, but not before they had said a great deal more than they intended to say. The eyes of George had plainly said, "Pity me!" and the eyes of Charlotte had as plainly answered, "I do." And before another moment had passed, they were standing beside each other,

though probably neither of them knew how it happened; it might be, perhaps, only because he generally did take Miss Verepoint in to dinner, and that he thought it was as well to have his arm ready when the signal should arrive. He spoke to her in a low voice, and she answered him in the same tone, and with a quiet air of kindly intimacy, that made him speedily forget that there were any such things as orange-coloured sarsenet and cherry-coloured cheeks in the world.

Mrs. Stephens' dinner was one of a class by no means so small in number as it ought to be. It may not yet appear to indicate any great refinement of taste, or any particularly exalted tone of moral feeling, to make the dinners of such a personage as Mrs. Stephens the subject of a grave philippic. But, nevertheless, conscience urges me to say a few words upon the subject, because it is one that, however vulgar, is of very decided importance to the comfort of that numerous and respectable portion of the human family, who like to live well, without having the power of

seeking this indulgence in that exalted sphere (I speak of earth and not of heaven).

“Dove si puote qual que si vuole.”

The grave philippic that my conscience urges me to make against the dinner of Mrs. Stephens is, that it was COLD. Now as every body *may* have their dinners hot, if they will only take the trouble of making a little fuss about it, I think it is doing a service to all the Mr. and Mrs. Stephenses in the world, and there are a great many of them, to assure them that if their dinners consisted of all the delicacies of the season, they would be worth nothing if they were cold. Having discharged my duty by saying thus much, I may proceed at once to the scenes which took place in the drawing-room after the cold dinner was got through and done with.

Mrs. Stephens, who very correctly thought that her dinner was not at all colder than usual, was in high spirits, as all ladies must be who feel conscious that they are presiding over exactly such a fête as their favourite day-dreams had led them to arrange

as precisely that which they should best like to preside over. It was quite a *county* party, and of the most distinguished as well as of the most agreeable kind. It was so difficult to get a party of pretty girls together! —and so much more difficult still to get a set of “good” men to meet them! But she had managed to do both. Talent might do any thing, she believed, and this was as true at Stoke as it would be in the gayest neighbourhood in the world.

Such were the thoughts which regaled her fancy as she sipped her coffee (although the coffee was as cold as the dinner), and such thoughts could hardly fail to make her gay, animated, and delightful. Even the interval which the gentlemen thought it civil to bestow upon Mr. Stephens’ thin claret, thick port, and hot sherry, did not appear tedious, such power has the animation of a “fine spirit” in producing the “fine issues” which lead to enjoyment!

“Celestina!” exclaimed Mrs. Stephens, placing herself at the pianoforte, “I must

positively play over poor dear Ford's favourite reel. I know he will be in the drawing-room the moment he hears it. Give me my footstool, Celestina. I don't mind any of you, my dear girls, so I shall not apologise for my chair, and my cushions, and all the rest of it. You should all of you try to get intimate with young married women, and go to stay with them. There is nothing so useful. Celestina Marsh is a perfect treasure! You, my dear Miss Dermont, my dear Julia, I mean, you will soon, I dare say, have a nice opportunity, for when Alfred Dermont is married, of course there is nobody so likely to be asked to stay with his wife as you. Where are they to live, dear?"

"I do not think it is quite settled yet," replied Julia, with resolute and very respectable composure.

"I understand. I presume, dear, that you are not yet quite taken into all their counsels. What a beautiful creature she is! Is not she, my dear Charlotte? Such a complexion! It is perfectly divine. But, ah, me! poor dear

creature, when she has been married as long as I have, I dare say she will flush after dinner, just as I do."

And here Mrs. Stephens ceased to indulge her fingers in rambling over the keys, raising both hands to her face, which really was all in a glow, nose, eyes, cheeks, and forehead.

"It is quite shocking, positively. My face is as hot as a coal; but young married women I believe, always are so, therefore it is no good to complain. Celestina! How abominably idle you are this evening! I won't practise playing, if you won't practise dancing. Do you all know Scotch steps, girls? I certainly do think that a Scotch reel is the loveliest dance in the world; all girls ought to learn it. It is the most bewitching style of thing imaginable. Something so playful, so frolicsome, so gay. Do you know it, my dear Miss Vere—my dear Charlotte, I would say? Is it not detestable to see how ceremony sticks to one, even when one is most determined to throw it off? But we will not be mastered by it, wil

we, dears? No! by my self I swear we will not. But tell me, Charlotte, do you know the Scotch reel?"

"Not very well," replied Miss Verepoint, "but I have seen the Miss Murrays dance it. I believe, however, that it ought to be danced by more than two."

"Two, three, four, I do not believe it signifies a farthing how many, or how few, provided there be a minstrel who will accompany them with spirit, and active heels, whether many or few. This is the style of play for it," and here the animated hostess began to thump the keys till they seemed to roar under the infliction. "Celestina!" she cried, "set off this minute, or I will not touch the instrument again to-night, and then we shall see what Ford will say. That's right, dear, dance away! I have no notion of wasting my sweetness on the desert air."

Miss Marsh had begun some dancing and prancing evolutions at half speed, upon hearing the threatening remonstrance of her friend; but, as there was no Mr. Ford there,

the inspiration was wanting, and after "setting" a little, and crossing twice with swimming drapery but languid limbs, she suddenly stopped, and, addressing Miss Verepoint, said,

"I should not at all mind our being seen dancing together. Gentlemen always like that, it looks so good-humoured and lively; but I don't at all like to do it all by myself. Do dance with me, Miss Verepoint! You say that you have seen the Murrays dance it, and if so, you must know how to dance it yourself. Nothing can be more easy. Do dance with me, Miss Verepoint!"

What was it that pleaded in the heart of Charlotte for compliance with this particularly disagreeable request? Was it that she thought her friend and neighbour, Mr. Marsh, would feel less annoyed if, when he entered with the other gentlemen, he should find his sister dancing with her, instead of making an enormously stout full-grown fool of herself alone? or was it that she wished to give George Marsh's sister something of conse-

quence in the eyes of the whole party by joining herself in the unnecessary exercise? Whatever the cause of her doing it, the effect was that she rose with the most gentle, quiet movement possible, and, greatly to the surprise of Julia, placed herself on the floor, opposite Celestina, who really looked big enough to swallow her up, and actually began moving her beautiful little feet in time to the thundering notes Mrs. Stephens was torturing out of the pianoforte.

At this moment the door opened, and the four gentlemen walked in. Miss Verepoint, whatever she might wish, had not courage to proceed, but instantly stood still, while Celestina, who the moment the door opened felt all the vivacious energy she had wanted before, set off again alone, like one possessed, exclaiming as she passed and repassed the blushing Charlotte, "Oh! you shabby cheat! Look at her, Mrs. Stephens! Only look at her! Is it not abominable?"

Mrs. Stephens having obtained the desired object of showing "the gentlemen" what a

very pleasant, lively party they were, twisted her arm-chair round upon its castors, and said, "I only wish you had all come in five minutes ago! Oh! those two mad-caps! They have been making me play reels for an hour by Shrewsbury clock! I am delighted that you are come to keep them a little in order, for they positively make me do just what they like. Charlotte, I have a great mind to punish you by making you sit with all the sobriety of a judge to make tea for me; but I suppose if I do this, that Miss Celestina will be jealous of her ancient privilege, so on that particular point we must let things remain in *statu quo*, for fear of consequences."

Miss Verepoint made no reply to all this lively and affectionate familiarity, contenting herself by quietly retreating to her chair, and addressing some trifling remark to Miss Drummond who was sitting near it.

George Marsh, meanwhile, was so utterly confounded by what he had seen and heard, that, having made two steps into the room, he stood, as if he had been shot, but had not

yet fallen. That Miss Verepoint should be skipping about the room to the thumping of Mrs. Stephens's boisterous fingers, and with his romping sister for a partner, had something so strange and unnatural in it, that he seemed to doubt the testimony of his own senses, as he contemplated the scene. But that she should permit herself to be called "Charlotte," and to be threatened with the office of tea-maker by her detestable hostess, was so much stronger still, that after a moment's meditation, he determined frankly to ask her if she did not find such familiarity rather greater than she liked.

Miss Verepoint was perhaps more vexed at this moment than she had ever felt in her whole life before. Conscious, fully conscious of the motive that had brought her there at all; conscious, fully conscious also, of that which had led her to share in the gambols of Miss Celestina, she felt so deeply, so heartily ashamed of herself, that she would have given her right hand could she have crept out unseen from the gay delights of

Mrs. Stephens's select party, and herself in her own dear bedroom at the Grange.

In this state of mind, the *naïve* questionings of George Marsh were any thing but agreeable.

"May I ask you, with the freedom of an old friend," said he, "how it has happened that this presumptuous lady has acquired the courage of addressing Miss Verepoint with such startling familiarity?"

Charlotte coloured violently, and remained silent long enough to let George Marsh read in her half-averted face a degree of emotion which led him to think that some influence stronger than any Mrs. Stephens could exert must have produced what he had witnessed. Had she thus permitted herself to be levelled with his sister, because she was his sister? Something a little like this thought had once or twice occurred to him before, and this, together with the blindness to consequences, which is so common a symptom in cases of love, is the only excuse I have to offer, for that and

other presumptuous thoughts, which had certainly of late been gradually stealing into his heart. Miss Verepoint, however, did not intend that his question should remain unanswered, she only waited till she felt that she had sufficiently recovered her composure to speak as she wished to speak, and then she said,

“I cannot be surprised at your remark, Mr. Marsh, as something very like the same question had just occurred to myself; but I am unable to give any satisfactory answer to either. The truth is, I have no business here at all; my coming was a folly, of which I feel ashamed, and both you and I must accept this feeling as an atonement.”

There was, perhaps, the least atom in the world of bitterness in this speech. Poor Charlotte's own reproaches had been severe enough to make her feel that those of Mr. Marsh were quite unnecessary; and she certainly wished to make him feel this too; but in this she failed completely, and so completely

did he misunderstand her, that a meaning the very reverse of what she wished to express was what he found in her words.

George Marsh was as far removed from any thing approaching to presumption as it was possible for a man to be, and there was in honest truth, no presumption in his believing at the bottom of his heart that Charlotte loved him. She did love him; and the only mistake was that she had not kept her own secret quite as well as she fancied she had. Unfortunately, most unfortunately for him, George fancied that her words conveyed the confession that she was domesticated in this strange manner with Mrs. Stephens, in consequence of the folly of expecting to meet him there, and that his fastidious delicacy, as well as her own, must accept of this as an apology.

“Presumption is a less deadly sin than ingratitude,” said George Marsh to himself, as he walked home that night by the light of the moon.

He said it more than once, and as there was nobody to contradict him, he became, before he reached Locklow Wood, perfectly convinced that it was so. Whereupon he walked into his study instead of going to bed and before he left it, he wrote the following lines.

“ In such a case as mine, Miss Verepoint, there is no opening for apology, no pretence for excuse. The simple truth must take its chance, and if it does not plead its own cause, it is hopeless to say any thing else for it. I love you, Miss Verepoint, and I now avow, what you surely perfectly well know already, only for the desperate purpose of forcing you to pronounce my doom. The contrast between the happiness of the hours I pass in your presence, and the misery which arises from the perilous uncertainty which comes upon me in your absence, is more than I can bear. If I had no hope, it seems to me that I should be less wretched than I am at present. Per-

haps I may think otherwise when I receive your answer.

“GEORGE TREMAYNE MARSH.”

Never surely did an avowal of love from a favoured lover reach its destination at so unpropitious a moment. When Miss Verepoint had dismissed her maid, whose unusually grave demeanour gave her silently but very plainly to understand, that she, the maid, found herself exceedingly put out, and very ill at ease in her present quarters, when she had dismissed the solemn-looking Sophia, she sat down in her dressing-gown before the glass, and paying much less attention to the image upon it than it deserved, fell into a reverie as grave as Sophia's face, upon the nature of the position into which her unauthorised attachment had led her.

In what could that attachment possibly end? COULD she submit to pass her days in sisterly familiarity with Celestina Marsh? Could she permit herself to be the frequent and intimate companion of Mrs. Stephens?

Hitherto it had ever been her mother's feelings under such associations, which had appeared to her as the great obstacle to her union with Mr. Marsh; but now, for the first time, perhaps, she became fully aware that she could not endure such association herself.

"But how am I to act, in order to convince him at once that I have made up my mind to put an end for ever to the folly which can only lead to the ultimate misery of both? Would to Heaven he would speak openly at once, and then it would soon be over."

No young lady ever breathed a wish in closing her eyes, that was more punctually fulfilled at her waking than was this of Charlotte Verepoint. When at the usual hour she rang her bell, her maid entered, bearing in her hand the short and pithy note, which has been faithfully given above.

"Come back to me in ten minutes, Sophy," said the young lady, who knew the handwriting at a glance.

"He is right, he is quite right," said she,

after reading his letter, and wiping away a natural tear or two, at the "end all" at which they had arrived. For she felt that the ten minutes she had bargained for would be quite sufficient to permit her writing all she intended to say in return. She took a pen, and rapidly wrote the following words :

"The many hours which we have lately passed together, have been more pleasant than wise. And I am so fully aware of the various reasons which must make the continuance of them highly objectionable for both of us, that I rejoice at the opportunity you have now given me of telling you that they must cease. God bless you, Mr. Marsh ! Be but as happy as I wish you, and you will have no reason to quarrel with your destiny. I shall explain to my mother with all confidence, and the most perfect truth, the reasons which must prevent our seeing you at the Grange for the future. Farewell!"

* * * *

"Celestina, I have business which renders my return to Germany absolutely necessary,"

said George Marsh to his sister, two days after he had received this terrible letter; for which important communication his sister afforded him an opportunity, by going home across the fields before breakfast, for the purpose of selecting a few more favourites, from her store of artificial flowers, in compliment to the Honourable Mr. Ford, who had been again favoured with an invitation to dinner.

“Going to Germany again?” she exclaimed, looking considerably astonished at the intelligence.

“Yes, Celestina, I must return to Germany, and I wish you to tell me if you have any objection to passing a few months with my mother’s old aunt at Carnarvon?”

“Objection, George? Good gracious, yes! To be sure I should have an objection. A horrible old woman like that, who never sees a man from January to December. How can you have the brutality to propose such a thing?”

“I should be very sorry, Celestina, to propose, or at least to urge upon you, any thing

that you disliked. But what is there you would prefer to this, my dear sister? I must go to Germany. It is absolutely necessary that I should do so, and what should you propose doing with yourself during my absence?"

"Why, to stay here, to be sure," she replied. "I really do not believe, George, that you intend to be so provoking as you really are. But, to be sure, there never was a girl so much out of luck as I am. Do only look back now, yourself, to every thing that has happened to me since you came home. You found me all but engaged to poor dear Wheeler, and you contrived, somehow or other, to affront him so violently at Colonel Dermont's breakfast party, that I don't think he ever spoke to me afterwards. There is many and many an obstinate self-willed girl who would have plagued a brother out of his life for playing her such a trick, and then broke her own heart into the bargain; but you know as well as I do, George, that I exerted myself to the very utmost to bear it well.

And when poor dear Waters gave me reason to believe that he loved me, I turned my thoughts from Wheeler, and was ready to devote myself to him with all the constancy of woman's love, when not strangled like mine for poor dear Wheeler in the very birth. And what happened next, George? Your thoughtless inattention to my feelings is carried to such an excess from mere natural hardness and callousness of heart, that I should not be the least bit surprised in the world, if you were to say that you did not know any thing about it; that is what you would like to say, isn't it, George? but it is no good to talk and dwell upon what is past and gone. It is only tearing one's feelings to pieces for nothing. Leave alone poor Waters then, and just look at the state of things now between me and the Honourable Mr. Ford. He is devoted to me, George; heart and soul he is devoted to me, and if you don't believe me, ask Mrs. Stephens—ask her who is the only really kind friend I ever had in the world—and if after you have asked, you have still the heart to

turn me out of this dear place—the very house in which I was born, and that too at such a moment—why all that is left is to pray to God that I may not live long.”

The miserable George whose thoughts were occupied by a variety of painful subjects, had not distinctly heard one word in ten of Celestina’s whining lament, nor clearly understood one in twenty. But when she drew forth her handkerchief, as she naturally did when speaking of the desirability of her approaching death, he understood enough to make him decide upon not attempting to control her, and gently taking her hand, said,

“Do not let my going vex you, Celestina; you shall stay here, if you like it. I hope a month or two may enable me to return, and perhaps, Mrs. Stephens will let you be a good deal with her during the interval.”

“To be sure she will, George,” gaily responded his sister; “you know very well that she is never contented without me, so you need have no uneasiness whatever on my account.”

And here the conversation stopped, for neither party seemed to think that there was any more to be said. Luckily Mr. Marsh had become aware that a good deal of prudence was necessary in all pecuniary affairs in which his sister was concerned, as from some peculiarity in her organisation, she had no power whatever of keeping possession of a shilling as long as streamers and flounces could be procured in exchange for it ; and he therefore appointed the old woman, formerly his nurse but now his housekeeper, to be his chancellor of the exchequer during his absence, charging her, however, to make her young mistress as comfortable as she could, and to let her have all the money she could spare after defraying the needful expenses of the house, and remitting to him the very small sum which he considered needful for himself. And all this being settled he kissed Celestina on each of her cherry cheeks, and set off on foot for the railroad—the love, the grace, the refinement of Miss Verepoint resting upon his memory like a dream, the

only certain and quite intelligible feelings that accompanied him being shame and repentance, for the vanity which had beguiled him into the hope that had been so suddenly crushed, and a deep but perfectly resigned conviction that happiness in this life was not intended for him.

CHAPTER IV.

THE breakfast-table at Beech Hill on the morning which followed Mrs. Stephens's first attempt at assembling a pleasant county party around her, was not a gay one. Mrs. Stephens herself, indeed, was all charming vivacity, and Mr. Stephens issued from his small study, the very model of a literary country gentleman; a review in one hand, and a small bill for guano in the other.

But Miss Verepoint, the chief pride and boast of the party, looked as pale as ashes, and answered the tender inquiries of her hostess, which were accompanied with an intimation that she must "try to get her colour up by the evening," for that she had

more beaux coming, by saying that she felt so unwell as to have made her send home for the carriage.

The brightness of Mrs. Stephens's countenance was suddenly and very perceptibly clouded by this intelligence, and her condolences uttered in a tone which displayed her disappointment quite as conspicuously as her sorrow.

"It is very unfortunate to be sure. I have made so many preparations for a pleasant party, that I can't help being a little vexed certainly. I can't help thinking you are in a great hurry to get away, my dear Miss Verepoint. I am sure if you have got a cold, or a mere accidental headache, or any thing of that sort, you should be well nursed and taken care of by the ladies and gentlemen both. Do think better of it! and let the carriage take us all a little airing instead of carrying you home."

Miss Verepoint, however, was not to be shaken; she really felt ill, and had no faith whatever in the curative effects of the pro-

mised nursing. This information was a sad blow to poor Julia, for the whole fabric of her resolution to be exceedingly happy was shaken by it. The manners of Miss Verepoint towards her were so kind and flattering, that she had looked forward to an increased intimacy with her as one of the very pleasantest hopes which the blank future could possibly offer ; and she was puzzled, too, as well as pained by her sudden retreat. They had passed half-an-hour together in the room of the elder young lady before descending to the drawing-room the day before, and there had been a mutual anticipation of pleasure from each other's society expressed between them, which made the departure of Charlotte as much a matter of surprise to Julia as to their unfortunate hostess.

“ And where is Miss Marsh, I wonder ?” said Mrs. Stephens, ringing the bell with an angry sort of jerk. “ Do you suppose she means to leave me, William, to pour out the tea and coffee myself ?”

“ Certainly not, dearest ! She could never

think of behaving in that sort of way. It is quite out of the question. But it is not all young ladies, Miss Verepoint, that have such hair as yours. Some ladies' hair requires a vast deal more to be done to it than others—and perhaps it may not look so well after all, you know.”

“Tell Miss Marsh that the coffee is in,” said Mrs. Stephens to the servant who answered the bell.

“Miss Marsh went out quite forward in the morning, ma'am,” said the man, “and I don't believe she is come back since.”

“Gone out?—not come back?—very extraordinary, isn't it, William? Upon my word I must make Miss Celestina understand that I don't quite approve of it. It is so exceedingly inconvenient and troublesome not to be ready for breakfast. Do step out, William, and look over the style leading to Locklow. Of course she is gone home about some of her fidgets. Really it is very disagreeable.”

Mr. Stephens, with his accustomed devo-

tion to his lady's will, left the room, but returned to it again almost immediately, bringing the defaulter with him.

"Upon my word, Celestina, you are absent without leave," said Mrs. Stephens, with a little sharpness of accent.

"I know it, my darling, dear Mrs. Stephens!—I know it perfectly well! And I believe I have walked at the rate of six miles an hour that I might get back in time, for I positively would not let you pour one single cup of coffee out of that heavy pot if you would give me ten pounds. But you will be able to pass judgment on me better when you hear what has happened. I had just galloped over this morning to speak a word to old Sarah about something I wanted, and after I had remained in my own room for about five minutes, looking for a particular thing in one of the drawers, I got a message from my brother, desiring to speak to me in his study. Well, of course I went as soon as I had done what I was about, and what do you think I got for my obedience?"

"Perhaps," said the host, "it was a box on the ear, Miss Celestina, to punish you for trusting yourself in those lonely fields at such an early hour in the morning."

"No, indeed, Mr. Stephens, that was not it," replied the young lady, "nor any thing else that looked like particular attention to me; but on the contrary, it was to inform me that he was going to take himself off to Germany again. Why or wherefore, Heaven only knows, for he never condescended even to hint at his reasons."

"Well, really that is very odd—is it not, Liebe? Did he say any thing about it when you gentlemen were left to yourselves after dinner yesterday?"

"No, indeed, love, not he," replied Mr. Stephens; "but of course he has got his own reasons. Perhaps he is gone to buy books. Did he say how long he was going to stay, Miss Celestina?"

"Not a word, not a single syllable, good, bad, or indifferent," she replied; "and I must say that I think it is perfectly abomina-

ble to leave me in that great dismal house without a soul to speak to. I am sure I do not know what I should do if it were not for you, my dearest Mrs. Stephens! But you are all kindness, and certainly the most delightful young married woman that ever girl was lucky enough to get for a friend!"

Charlotte Verepoint trembled from head to foot. It was not merely from emotion at hearing that the man she loved had left his country, driven from thence by her, for half a moment's consideration sufficed to make her feel that it was the best and wisest step that could be taken for the tranquillity of both. But poor Charlotte trembled lest she should be unable to conceal the interest she took in the news, and again it was female artifice to which one of the truest of human beings had recourse in order to conceal what, as a woman, it was her positive duty to hide. She let fall both her gloves and her smelling-bottle on the carpet, and the movement necessary to recover them gave her the relief she wanted, by enabling her to escape

the eyes which she fancied were fixed upon her.

But the device was altogether superfluous ; for Mr. Stephens, Mrs. Stephens, and their friend, Miss Celestina, were all so fully occupied by the interest which they took in the intelligence themselves, and also by their coffee and eggs, that it never entered the head of either of them to look in the face of Charlotte Verepoint, in order to ascertain what she might think about it. But the old adage, " set a thief," &c., proved itself worthy of all credit on the present occasion, for little Julia Drummond saw more than either of her experienced seniors. Not, indeed, that it was the present occasion only which had enlightened her. The few days that Miss Verepoint had passed at the Mount at the time of Miss Thorwold's first visit there, had sufficed to convince the young Julia that George Marsh was the only person in the world whose name was likely to make Charlotte's cheek turn either red or pale, and now, although my no means intending to pry into

her secret thoughts, her eyes turned involuntarily towards her on hearing the statement of Celestina.

This glance was quite sufficient to confirm all her former observations, and her own heart beat as she perceived poor Charlotte's efforts at concealment.

"I am afraid I have cut my finger!" said Julia. "How very clumsy."

This was, of course, quite enough to draw all eyes upon herself, and Mr. Stephens, in particular, was exceedingly anxious to examine the poor ill-used little finger; but it was already twisted up in her pocket-handkerchief, and by the time they had all talked a little more about it, the danger was pretty well over, and Charlotte Verepoint was doing all she could to feel extremely glad that poor George had taken such effectual means to ensure the separation she had recommended.

Before the carriage arrived for Miss Verepoint, she whispered an invitation to Julia to accompany her into her room, and, as soon as they were safely tête-à-tête, she said,

I am afraid, dear Julia, you will think I am using you very ill by running away, but I cannot undertake any more evenings like the last. It is not that I mean to give myself airs, but that I really do not exactly know how to behave. You managed far better than I did, and contrived to sit so quietly still while Miss Marsh and myself were performing our graceful evolutions by way of practice, that you have less reason to fear a repetition of the scene than I have."

"I must not complain of you, Miss Verepoint," replied Julia, laughing; "but to my fancy it is *you* who have managed best, for it is quite impossible, you know, for me to have a headache too. Mrs. Stephens would be sure to send for the apothecary to ask him a few philosophical questions upon the possibility of infection in headaches. No; I must stay till my promised week is up."

"Then will you promise to let me try to behave better to you at the Grange than I have done here," said Charlotte, eagerly; "will you

promise to pass a few days with me when you have completed your term here?"

Julia was delighted. "How very kind of you, my dear Miss Verepoint," she said, "I shall like it so much!"

"You have promised to stay a whole week, have you, Julia? then what day may I tell mamma that you will be her guest? Perhaps you will like to go home for a day or so between your two visits?"

"No," replied Julia, colouring, "I shall not wish to do that. I can desire them to send me any thing I want from the Mount, without going home for it."

"I am very glad to hear you say so, dear Julia, for the sooner you come to me the better I shall like it."

And then it was settled between them that Mrs. Verepoint's carriage should come to Beech Hill for her on the following Monday, after which, both agreeing that it would be very bad behaviour to remain chatting any longer, they re-entered the drawing-room, where Mrs. Stephens and Celestina were talking and laugh-

ing at a great rate when they opened the door, but ceased rather abruptly as soon as they made their appearance within it. An abundance of civil things were then said upon the regret felt at seeing Miss Verepoint equipped for departure, and the carriage was announced before the subject was exhausted.

Julia was greatly afraid, and certainly not without reason, that her presence destroyed an animated tête-à-tête between Mrs. Stephens and her friend, Miss Marsh, but for a time she was aware that civility required her both to give and to receive the annoyance which such a superfluous presence was sure to produce ; but she was obliged to submit to it, for it might have been as well to accompany Miss Verepoint to the Grange at once, as to have retired to her own room in order to keep herself out of the way. So there she sat, poor girl, endeavouring not to perceive the nods and winks of intelligence exchanged by her companions as they gently led the conversation, and then firmly fastened it upon "the officers," their likes and their dislikes—the chances for and

against their being able to marry, even if they *were* seriously attached, poor dear fellows ! and the immense advantage that it was for a neighbourhood when " the officers " sent into it were, as in the present instance, of noble families ; for then, if any thing *did* come to any thing, it could never be called a *bad* match, let what would come of it.

For Julia to join in this conversation in any way by which she could hope to make herself agreeable was out of the question, but she went on assiduously knitting a purse for the colonel, smiled whenever she was spoken to, and answered every question she was asked as well as she could. But this morning, and the next, and the one after, did certainly seem of very unusual length, nor did an occasional tête-à-tête walk in " the grounds " with Celestina greatly mend the matter. The theme was still the same, varied only by occasional questionings as to the wedding clothes of Miss Thorwold.

This was all very disagreeable, tedious, and trying to the spirits, but in Julia's estimation

the *lively* evenings were infinitely worse. The Honourable Mr. Ford, who had before been a frequent visiter, now became a constant one, and the nods and the winks of the morning conversations which followed the evening sports, became more mysterious than ever. For several of these happy evenings the vehemence with which Celestina enjoyed herself, and the exhilarating persuasion that "poor dear Ford" really was very much attached to her, or he never would *keep on coming* so constantly, prevented her from perceiving that poor dear Ford was beginning to relax a little in his practising instructions, and that he frequently sat down by Miss Drummond, and began talking to her when he ought to have been placing Miss Marsh's feet in the right position for "setting." But at last the detestable truth flashed upon her, and she bolted Mrs. Stephens's bedroom door in order to exclude Mr. Stephens for several minutes beyond the usual time (the two ladies always indulged in a short little "con-fab" before he was admitted), in order to give

herself an opportunity of asking her friend's opinion on the subject.

"Now, don't deceive me, Mrs. Stephens, there will be no friendship in that, but totally the reverse. I want you to tell me with perfect and entire sincerity what you think of Ford's sitting down four different times last night close to that odious white-washed little wretch, Miss Drummond. Only just tell me what you think of it ; that's all I ask?"

"Why, my dearest Celestina, what can I think of it, but that men, the great majority of them at least, are light and inconstant as the wanton wind," said Mrs. Stephens, shaking her head, and sighing deeply.

"Then good gracious, Mrs. Stephens, why didn't you tell me so at first?" replied the agitated Celestina, with a good deal of asperity. "You have constantly been going on telling me that you knew mankind too well to be deceived, and that it was plain as the sun at noon-day that Ford was in love with me ! I do think that I *am* the most unfortunate girl upon the face of God's earth !"

"It is perfect folly, Celestina, to reproach me with it," returned the irritated matron. "I said no more than the truth when I told you that I could read the heart of man. There are few women, I will venture to say, of my age, who have studied the subject more, or understand it better. But fine spirits will produce fine issues, Celestina; and where the spirit is not fine, the issue of it will be disappointing in proportion."

"Why did you not tell me then that the spirit of Ford was not fine, as you call it," returned Celestina, with an hysteric sob. "I declare before Heaven, that I should never have given my heart to him, as I have done, if I had not been led by you to believe that he was in earnest, and really did mean something. Oh! Mrs. Stephens!—indeed, indeed it is too cruel!"

"Before you accuse me so vehemently, Celestina, would it not be wiser to look about you a little, and see who else there may be who deserves more blame than I do? I am still perfectly convinced that Ford *was* in

earnest, and *did* mean something. But I never told you, did I? that I knew he was proof against the artful attacks of a girl, who is, if I am not very much mistaken, of Indian extraction, and is, therefore, sure to have a good deal of the serpent about her. I never told you, did I, that if a sly creature like that, pretending to look as innocent as a lamb, was to come and sit down right before his eyes, and by constantly refusing to learn the steps which both he and you offered to teach her, gave him to understand that if he had any thing particular to say to her, he must please to come and sit in her pocket, or else she would not listen to him? I did not tell you, did I, my dear, that if this was to happen, he would neither see, hear, nor answer the insidious little hussey? I never undertook to answer for this, did I?"

"I see it!—I see it!—I see it all!" exclaimed the agitated young lady; "and I am *perfectly* certain that you are right. Oh! Mrs. Stephens! what a woman you are! What observation!—What quickness!—

What discernment! To be sure—I remember it all now, though in the innocent gaiety of my heart at the time, I never thought any thing of it. Do you remember when Charlotte Verepoint got up to dance with me, how this little minx refused to move? She was afraid to spoil her horrid straight hair, nasty creature, before Ford came in. Oh! I understand it all now; and did you observe when I was making the tea, how she pretended there was no sugar in it, for no other reason on earth, take my word for it, than just to make him take her cup, and bring it back to her again. And then the oranges!—oh! Mrs. Stephens, do you remember the oranges? How could I be such a fool as not to understand it? How she first said she would not, and then that she would. What could that be for, I should like to know, but merely to keep him in attendance? Horrid, sly, hypocritical little monster! Pretending to look so quiet and modest all the time, as if she were the very model of innocence itself. Well! to be sure

one may be too simple-hearted and unsuspecting, and that is what I must have been all this time, there is no doubt about it. But I would not change with her artful slyness, no, not if I saw that poor, besotted Ford kneeling at her frightful Chinese-looking little feet! But if there is one thing that at the very bottom of my heart I do hate and detest more than any thing else in creation, it is a regular sly flirt like Julia Drummond! I know well enough what it is to feel the heart touched, even when the sentiment is not one calculated to endure for life. I know that, for the time, it is really honest and sincere, and an innocent, frank-hearted girl like me, often gives herself up to it for the moment, perhaps more than she ought to do, that is with respect to her own advantage; because it is, I know, a sort of thing that will often keep others off. I confess that I may, more than once, have been guilty of this sort of thoughtless folly. But what a difference, isn't there, Mrs. Stephens, between *that* and such conduct as Miss Drummond's! I do

hate her, I have no scruple to say it, with all my heart and soul ! And what is more, I should hate my own self if I did not."

" And very natural too, my dear love," returned Mrs. Stephens, tucking up all her curling-papers under the nightcap, and then carefully arranging the quilled border of the said nightcap, and tying it under her chin. " Heaven knows, I don't wonder at your being angry. But I can't let you stay any longer talking about it now, Celestina, because Stephens has knocked twice, though I dare say that in your agitation you did not hear him ; and, therefore, I must wish you good night, my poor dear, and all I can say is, that when that stiff little girl has taken herself off, I think it is more likely than not, that Ford will be just the same as ever again."

Celestina got up from her chair, and sighed deeply.

" But even if he should, Mrs. Stephens, what confidence can I have ? How can I hope that he will keep on steady long enough

for any good to come of it?" said she, in a tone of profound despondence.

"Well, my dear, I can't help this now, you know I can't, because I must go to bed, if you please, and Stephens must be let in," returned her friend, rather fretfully.

"And you forsake me too! I see you do, Mrs. Stephens," said Celestina, bursting into tears. "But don't fancy I resent it—I don't do any such thing—I know you can't help it. You have most unfortunately brought this unprincipled girl into the house, and I must take the consequences. You can't help it now, I know."

And having uttered these words with another heartrending sigh, she went out, not having strength or spirits to give Mr. Stephens more than one affectionate glance as she passed him.

* * * * *

It is impossible not to suppose that the manners of Miss Marsh towards Miss Drummond were a good deal altered in consequence of this discovery; but, strange as it may seem,

Julia never found it out: The sort of penance she was enduring was of the hopeless kind, which leads to a dull sort of passiveness rather than acuteness of observation; and had she been obliged to say whether Miss Celestina Marsh had been most disagreeable during the first or the last days of her visit, it is very likely that she would have expressed a preference for the latter period. By slow but sure degrees, however, this dismal week wore away, and Julia having received the willing permission of her guardian, changed her quarters from Beech Hill to the Grange.

Notwithstanding the secret sorrow which lay deep in each of their hearts, the two young girls, now thrown into close and intimate association, soon discovered that they suited each other particularly well, and that there was enjoyment, great enjoyment, in such companionship. Not a syllable was uttered between them, however, respecting their unhappy loves; which, although different in all other circumstances, had this in common, that they were utterly hopeless, and

therefore that the silence which delicacy and right feeling enjoined, was as salutary as it was discreet. They walked together, they read, they discussed together; and the neighbourly acquaintance was fast ripening into firm and enduring friendship, when Julia received the following note from Mrs. Dermont :

“ My dear Julia,

“ Your guardian and I, and, indeed, Alfred also, think that your visit, though we doubt not that it has been exceedingly pleasant, has lasted almost long enough, and that it is time for you to come home again. One reason why we are anxious that you should do so is, that our dear Miss Thorwold is going away. It is only for a week or two indeed, and it is to visit her excellent friend, Mrs. Knight, whose affection for her it is quite beautiful to witness, and our noble-minded Alfred is the last person in the world to wish that, for his sake, she should do any thing that was ungrateful and wrong; yet, for all that, poor

fellow, he is dreadfully out of spirits, and, we think, and indeed he seems to think too, that your coming home would be a comfort for him; and, after saying this, I am sure you would not wish to delay your return for a moment. There is, too, another reason, your guardian says for your coming home, and that is, that you will be of age the beginning of next week, and though he does not wish to have any party or make any fuss about it, on account of Alfred's not being in spirits, still, he says, it is proper for you to be here. The carriage is to take Miss Thorwold to Crosby on Monday, and as it must pass close to the Grange, it may call for you as it returns.

"Be sure to give all our kind compliments to Mrs. and Miss Verepoint, and express our gratitude properly for the notice they have so kindly taken of you.

"Believe me, my dear Julia,

"Very sincerely your friend,

"MARGARET ELIZABETH DERMONT."

The servant who brought this letter waited

for an answer, and Julia, only delaying long enough to convey the far from welcome tidings to her friends, despatched it, containing an assurance that, notwithstanding the happiness she had enjoyed during her visit, it would give her great pleasure to return to the Mount. A few days, therefore, terminated this visit, and once again she found herself in the society of Alfred. At first it seemed to her as if all that had happened, and all she had suffered was a dream, so nearly resembling the ways and manners of the days which were gone for ever was every thing she found. At no time since the fatal breakfast had the manner of Alfred to herself been so nearly what it used to be as it was now, excepting that he was somewhat more attentive in trifles, and treated her less like a child than heretofore. But there was the same unceremonious demand upon her time, and the same sort of tacit avowal that he was not contented to remain long where she was not.

Poor Julia would have been puzzled to say

whether she found more pain or pleasure in this, but the doubt was not permitted to endure long, for the day after her return Alfred invited her, as he had done many scores of times before, to take a walk of two or three miles with him. Had it been possible to refuse the invitation she would have done it; not because she did not like it, but because she was terrified at liking it so much. But she dared not expose herself to the astonishment as well as the displeasure of Alfred, and therefore accepted the invitation with a smile.

Exactly as he was wont to do in the days that were gone, Alfred raised his elbow without saying a word, as a signal that she was to pass her arm under it. The only difference was, that when he had got her hand under his left arm, he crossed his right hand over to take it. He not only took it, but held it, and not only held it but pressed it, pressed it tenderly. Poor Julia! Her chief suffering at that moment arose from terror lest he

should feel or hear, as she fancied he might, how her heart beat.

This state of feeling, however, did not last long ; it could not last longer than the silence of Alfred, and that was soon broken by his saying, " What a very happy fellow I am, my dearest Julia ! But I do not think that I can reproach myself with ingratitude, for I never open my eyes to the light without fervently thanking Heaven for the unequalled blessings that are showered upon me ! Oh ! Julia, what a woman it is that Providence has selected for me as a wife ! I give you my honour, Julia, that there are moments when her sweetness, her unequalled beauty, her finished grace and heavenly goodness, make me tremble lest it should be all a dream, or, that instead of her being a woman, I should find that she was an angel, visiting the earth to arouse in the hearts of man a stronger wish for heaven ! "

He ceased, and Julia plainly perceived that he expected her to make a speech in reply.

But what was she to say? Believing in her soul that the woman he thus adored was interested, artful, false, frivolous, and, in fact, as contemptible in every way as it was well possible for a woman to be; believing all this, was she to tell him that he was indeed a happy man, and that she wished him joy of it? Or, scorning such hypocrisy, was she to say that he was quite mistaken, that Amelia was a heartless wretch, perfectly unworthy of him, and that if he wished to be happy he must look elsewhere for a wife—could she say this to him? Yet to say nothing was infinitely worse than either, for it might seem purposely intended to give him an opportunity of guessing what she felt about it herself; and with this terror before her eyes she was beginning to stammer out something about her being certain that he deserved to be happy, when she was fortunately prevented from making the dangerous experiment by Alfred's pressing her arm affectionately, and saying, "But you must not fancy, my dearest Julia, that I forget, when thanking Heaven for the

blessings bestowed upon me, the sweet addition to all my happiness which I possess from the enjoyment of your precious friendship. The heart of man, Julia, is sufficiently capacious to contain more than one strong affection, and when I look back upon all the happy days of our youth, upon your well-trying and well-proved affection for me, and upon all the freshly-remembered proofs you have given from your earliest infancy to the present hour, of the brightest, sweetest nature ever bestowed upon a mortal, when I think of all this, dear play-fellow, I feel that I am a covetous, a most unreasonably covetous man, for that not even the possession of Amelia will content me, unless I may still possess also the partial friendship of Julia Drummond. Tell me, my dear Julia, may I hope for this ?”

Virtue is its own reward, despite all the sneering doubts and carping witticisms which have attacked the assertion ; but it certainly does not always happen that the reward follows so closely upon what calls for it as it did

now. Nothing but the truth, the deep sincerity, the sublime purity of Julia's virtuous feelings could have saved her at this moment from the most cruel, the most fatal embarrassment. But she felt, as she listened to Alfred, a glow at her heart that seemed to elevate her above the reach of sorrow, and conscious of being capable of finding in the friendship he offered, a source of happiness sufficient to cheer and soften her existence as long as life endured, she answered him with equal firmness and sincerity.

"God bless you, my dear, kind Alfred," said she, "for thinking so much and so affectionately of your old companion and friend! And you may very safely believe me when I promise, that you shall never find less affection from me than you have ever done. You have paid me some very fine compliments, dear Alfred, and I will not repeat them back again to you lest you should take them for mere current coin, offered by way of payment; but the thousand and one proofs you have given me, that even in the very strongest

paroxysms of whim and will you could never forget your kind feelings to your babyish little companion, are not very likely to be forgotten."

From this point the conversation proceeded with almost equal pleasure to both. Each felt as if the bar which seemed to have risen between them, was removed, and that they should take good care it never came to torment them again.

Their walk included a visit to the cottage of Jenkins, the wood-cutter, to whose daughter Julia had the pleasure of delivering a very kind message from the colonel, informing her that if she still wished to take the place of her waiting-maid, she might bring herself and her boxes to the Mount on the following Tuesday, that being the day fixed for her first enjoying the dignity of having a maid of her own.

The joy with which this announcement was received both by Susan and her mother, may be easily imagined, and the two friends set off on their return home with the pleasant

consciousness of having left a great deal of happiness behind them.

"Is not Susan a pretty, nice, sweet-tempered-looking girl, Alfred?" said Julia, as they turned away from the cottage.

"Pretty?" replied Alfred, with a laugh.

"Upon my word, Julia, you must excuse me if I am a little fastidious on that point. With such forms and faces as yours and Amelia's perpetually before my eyes or in my memory, it is hardly reasonable to expect that I should find any beauty in such a dowdy-looking little waiting-maid as your Susan."

"Beauty, they say, is in a great degree matter of fancy," replied Julia; "and there is something so very guileless and innocent-looking in the countenance of Susan, that I not only think her pretty, but I positively love her, and that must be, in a great degree, from her good looks, because I was too young when she left her home to form any rational judgment as to her character. But I think I never saw any body in my life that I should be inclined to trust more implicitly than Susan."

“Well, dear, I have no doubt you may be right, but the metal was not sufficiently attractive to make me examine it accurately enough to judge of its intrinsic value,” replied Alfred.

CHAPTER V.

AND now the morning arrived to which the worthy and grateful-hearted Colonel Dermont had been looking forward for years as one of the happiest of his life. He had never said a syllable to Julia, or to Alfred either, of the manner in which every sixpence of Julia's income had been hoarded, in order to augment her little fortune. He had, indeed, frequently mentioned the fact, that the fortune bequeathed to her by her grandmother, was seven thousand pounds, but without giving the slightest hint that it had been increased to half as much again solely by his good management.

At breakfast, the colonel set the example of wishing her joy, "many happy returns," and so forth ; and as soon as the meal was over, he addressed her with a very happy look ; but, at the same time, with a good deal of solemnity.

"And now, my dear Julia," he said, "I must request the favour of your company in my library."

Julia immediately got up to attend him, but without having any notion for what reason she was wanted.

"Alfred !" added the colonel, "I should wish you, my dear son, to come too, and your mother also, if she will do us the favour."

Of course no objection was made, and to the library they all went. The large table, which always stood in the middle of the room, was covered with papers, among which was a large parchment of several sheets, which was laid wide open, as if to gratify the curiosity of all present, and Julia turned pale as she looked at it, for she felt

persuaded that she was looking upon the marriage settlement of Alfred, which had doubtless just arrived, and for which, probably, her signature was about to be requested.

"Have the kindness to sit down, all of you," said the colonel. They sat down accordingly, and then he drew a multitude of accounts towards him, reading aloud a variety of sums total, purporting to be the receipts and investments of all the half years', during which he had been receiving Julia's little income from the funds, and replacing it in her name as regularly.

"And now, my dear," he concluded, placing several printed documents in her hand, "I have the pleasure of presenting you with vouchers which prove you to be in the possession of stock, worth exactly ten thousand seven hundred pounds sterling. Will you give me a kiss for having managed your little money matters so well?"

Julia hastened to him, and gave the requested kiss, but having done so, said, "You must forgive my being so very stupid, my dear sir, but how can I have ten thousand

pounds, and I know not how many hundreds besides, when only seven thousand were left to me?"

This question was exactly what the colonel had been looking forward to for the last fifteen years of his life, and he answered it with a smile, then very eloquently expressed all the pleasure it gave him, by modestly stating how he had defrayed all her expenses, and endeavoured, in all things, to treat her as a daughter, in order to prove, to the best of his power, how constantly he kept in mind the service rendered to him by her gallant grandfather.

Nothing could be more touchingly simple, and unmistakably sincere, than the manner in which Julia returned her thanks for all his kindness; and there was such a new and pretty gravity in her look and language as she did this, that the fine eyes of Alfred filled with tears as he looked at her.

"What a sweet creature it is!" thought he, "I much doubt if I shall ever see a man that I shall think worthy of her!"

The colonel, who, according to custom,

looked round at Alfred, to see what he thought of what was going on, perceived how greatly he was touched by it, and not choosing that his idol should be made to shed tears, let the meaning of them be what it might, immediately assumed much gaiety of manner, and said, "Now then, my young lady, you may consider yourself as by far the most independent personage in the family,—for you are the only one who can make ducks and drakes of your property, if such be your wish, will, and pleasure."

"Ducks and drakes?" repeated Julia, laughing, "how can I make ducks and drakes of all this quantity of money?"

"Why, this is the way you may make ducks and drakes of it, my dear. You have only to write a line to our good friend, Mr. Wood, the broker, telling him to send you down a power of attorney by the post, for you to sign, and when you have done it, you may give it to any body you please, who may straight-way sell as much stock as you choose to order, out of the funds, and then, you know, when you have got it, you may change it all

into half-crowns, and make ducks and drakes with it in Mrs. Verepoint's great fish-pond."

"Thank you, sir," replied Julia, catching the gay tone in which he spoke ; "I shall be sure to remember your instructions, when I am seized with a longing for the amusement you mention."

"Only take care, my dear," he rejoined, "that you do not fall in love with somebody who may play the game for you."

Julia smiled, blushed, and shook her head. "I flatter myself there is no danger of that," she replied.

"So much the better, so much the better, Julia," said the colonel ; "and now, without troubling Mr. Wood at all, here is enough for you to amuse yourself, I hope, for six months to come. Here, my dear," he continued, spreading a number of notes upon the table, "here is the first dividend upon your property that I have ever drawn out of the bank ; I received this last July, and you must please to remember, young lady, that (unless indeed you follow my instructions, and send to the broker's) you won't have any more till

next January. Here, my child, put it up, and take care of it, like a good girl." And he collected the notes and put them into her hand as he spoke.

"Is it possible that all this quantity of money is mine!" said Julia, looking half frightened at the sight of her wealth.

"All this quantity, my dear?" replied the colonel, shaking his head. "It is all very well, Julia, for the purchase of bobbins and bows, and to pay the wages of your own maid, you know; and as long as I live you won't want it for any thing else; but in case no more Honourable Mr. Borrowdales should happen to come in your way, I fear you may find out that it is but a poor little income after all. However, my dear, I have a scheme in my head that will bring it up, without the slightest danger, to above five hundred pounds. I have heard of a capital good mortgage, Julia, and you must sell out of the funds, my dear, and invest your money in that. I am expecting almost every post to learn the last particulars about it, and then, by your leave and pleasure, the thing shall

be settled at once, and when this is done I shall feel more at ease about you."

The remainder of this important day was passed for the most part in conversation between Alfred and his parents upon the probable duration of Amelia's visit to Mrs. Knight, and also of what might be the earliest possible day at which they might hope to hear that the "eternal" settlements were completed. Alfred, it is true, occasionally addressed a remark to Julia, first upon one of those interesting themes, and then upon the other, but by far the most enlivening variety which occurred, was a proposal on the part of Alfred, that if Miss Thorwold did not return to the Mount by a certain day, at no great distance, they should go over to Crosby and take possession of her by means of a little gentle violence.

In reply to this proposal Mrs. Dermont suggested that, as a preliminary step, it might be as well to write a pleading letter to Mrs. Knight, beseeching her, in the names of love and pity, to remit a few days of the time for which she had stipulated. This last measure

was proposed very seriously, and very seriously acted upon, and an epistle, signed by the young man and both his parents, was accordingly written, and delivered to Mrs. Knight at her breakfast table, while seated there with the fair Amelia opposite to her.

The lady of Crosby perused the letter with rather a satirical sort of smile, and then handed it to her friend, expecting to receive in return a vehement, and, perhaps, angry protestation that she would not be either cheated or bullied out of the short remnant of peace and happiness upon which she had reckoned, and, in short, that she would not stir a single hour before that which had been already fixed upon. It was, therefore, with considerable surprise that she heard Miss Thorwold say, laying down the letter very quietly, and returning without any great symptoms of discomposure to her coffee and roll, "It is a bore, but I must go."

"*Must* go, Amelia? Upon my word, my dear, I think you are beginning your obedience rather too early. Why must you go?"

"Because I do not like to run the risk of

displeasing any of them. It is quite as well to keep things smooth, you know."

Mrs. Knight looked at her steadily for a moment, and then said, "As I live, Amelia, I do believe that beautiful creature, Alfred, has touched your fancy at last. Do not be ashamed to confess it. You really need not. I told you long ago, you may remember, that comparing him to Lord William was comparing "Hyperion to a Satyr." And now, I suppose, you begin to find out that I was right."

Miss Thorwold looked at her and smiled. Had she smiled without looking at her, Mrs. Knight would have taken it for granted that she had read the riddle aright, but the look puzzled her. There was something spiteful, something bitter in it—but whether against Lord William, Alfred Dermont, or herself, she could not tell, and feeling some little curiosity to discover, she varied her attack, and said,

"That look means to say I am wrong, I suppose, does it not? And in that case I am to presume that despite his fickleness and

falsehood you still hold fast to the belief that his lordship's long visage and black favoris, outvalue all other manly beauty whatsoever."

Amelia did not again look up, but a visible shudder passed over her.

"Mercy on me!" exclaimed the pertinacious cross-examiner. "You are determined to put me at fault, Amelia. That shudder, my dear, was a vast deal more like hatred than love. I wish you would tell me what it all means. But really since you took that freak of running abroad, you have grown both moody and mysterious—not to mention that you have taken to an exceedingly foolish trick of turning red and white alternately, which is likely, in Amelia Thorwold, to beget more curiosity than admiration."

At no period of the beautiful Amelia's life had she ever been able to endure with patience any thing like an attempt to dive into more of her secrets than it was her will and pleasure to disclose, and it is not difficult to believe that this averseness to enforced confidence was at this moment considerably

stronger than ever. It required a vigorous effort of purpose over passion, to prevent her from bursting out, as she had often done in days of yore, in expressions of resentment and rage against the insidious wish of learning more than was meant to meet the ear; but such efforts were becoming habitual, and it cost, therefore, but one strong gulp to enable her to master the inclination to scold, and to reply with a tolerably easy air of indifference. "I declare to you, my dear Mrs. Knight, that if I knew how to satisfy your affectionate anxiety respecting the state of my affections, I really would do it, but having already told you all I know myself on that worn-out theme, I do not think I shall make the matter any clearer by prolonged discussion. My freak of running abroad, as you still unkindly call it, did certainly so far change me as to give me time for a little serious reflection, the result of which, as I have already very frankly told you, was to make me decide upon marrying Mr. Dermont. Further secret have I none, and considering that I am now endeavouring

to make up my mind quietly and contentedly, to the fate that is before me, I do think it would be more judicious, and certainly it would be more kind, if for the future you would talk no more to me about the state of my heart."

This was so reasonable a remonstrance, that Mrs. Knight, with all her cleverness, and notwithstanding a strong lurking suspicion that her beautiful young friend had some secret or other that was beyond her power to make out, could find nothing better to say in return to it than, "Very true, my dear, you are quite right, and I am quite wrong, so if you really have any heart left, we will endeavour to forget it."

"Thank you," returned Amelia; "and now, then, perhaps, you had better answer the Dermont despatch."

"Oh! true! I forgot the man was waiting, but I hope, my dear, that you do not really mean to run away from me yet?"

"You are excessively kind, my dear Mrs. Knight," replied her beautiful friend, who felt at that moment as if she would rather have bound herself to pass the remainder of her

life tête-à-tête with the dull Mrs. Dermont, than expose herself to any longer endurance of the agreeable Mrs. Knight's intolerable acuteness; "but I am sure you must feel with me that as I have made up my mind to form this connexion, it must be for my happiness to make all things go as smoothly between us, while preparing for it, as possible, and therefore I will beg you to tell them in your answer, that as it is evident my heart yields to the recall, you cannot venture to oppose the whole phalanx, and that I shall be ready to attend them when they come for me."

Mrs. Knight uttered not a single word in reply, but drawing towards her a little writing table that stood near, wrote the answer as nearly as possible in the terms dictated, read it rapidly but distinctly aloud, lighted her taper, slid the note into its cover, sealed it, rang the bell, and gave it to the servant without indicating either by word, look, or gesture, whether she approved the proceeding or not.

Very different from this profound silence was the manner in which the despatch was

received at the Mount. The impetuous Alfred, delighted beyond all measure at the success of his manœuvre, literally danced with glee; his father cried, "Bravo, Alfred! you really seem to understand admirably well how to get your own way," and Mrs. Dermont clasped her hands, lifted her eyes to heaven, and exclaimed: "Was there ever such a dear, gentle, affectionate creature as our sweet Amelia! Ah! Alfred! It is quite plain that you may lead her any way you wish, but I hope it will ever be by a silken rein."

"Silken, my dearest mother!" replied the enraptured Alfred, "it shall be all of roscobuds, cotton, and velvet!"

Julia heard the note read, and heard too the burst of rapture which followed it, and then she quietly slipped out of the room, very sure that at such a moment she should not be missed, nor was she; nobody indeed, knew whether she were in the room or not, and being quite aware of this, she determined upon a long, solitary walk, in the course of which she very deliberately and rationally examined the reasons for and against her

remaining in the house during the short remainder of the courtship, provided (that is to say) she were invited by her friend Charlotte to leave it. Of this invitation indeed she was very comfortably secure, both Mrs. Verepoint and her daughter having made her promise that she would let them know as soon as the business which her guardian had talked about was completed, in order that a day might be fixed for her returning to finish the visit which had been so suddenly and unexpectedly curtailed. Julia had so well schooled herself to the necessity of enduring what was painful, that she would not have made the effort she now decided upon, had she feared nothing worse than present annoyance from witnessing the tender scenes which were likely to take place. Her sensations indeed, under this species of infliction were of a very different kind from what the generality of enamoured and hopeless young ladies may suppose. Painful they certainly were, but for the most part this pain arose from the profound belief that the being around whom poor Alfred wandered

with such passionate devotion, such confiding fondness, was wholly and in every way unworthy of him. This was a misery upon which neither her absence nor her presence could produce the slightest effect, either as it concerned her own feelings or his destiny; and it was not this which drove her away, for well she knew that it would pursue and torture her, let her go where she would. But what she did fear was, the demonstration of Alfred's restored feelings of affection towards herself. She was perfectly well aware that from a very early period of their acquaintance, Miss Thorwold had sought to weaken this attachment, and she was also aware that Alfred had suffered deeply from the coldness between them which had followed the spelling scene. This coldness had not only been completely removed during the absence of Amelia, but his affection for his friend and play-fellow had evidently gained in strength by the short but terribly painful interruption which it had suffered. "I shall never," thought Julia, "be able to endure the demonstrations of his renewed af-

fection, his pure, precious, brotherly affection, in her presence, knowing as I do that it is hateful to her to witness it, and that it will moreover infallibly lead to more scenes calculated all and every of them to render me not only odious to him, but really injurious to his happiness."

The nature and object of these meditations had led her, perhaps, almost unconsciously to take the path across the fields which led to the Grange. It is certain, nevertheless, that she did not contemplate walking there when she set out; but by the time that she had fully made up her mind to believe that the most right and proper thing she could do would be to procure a renewed invitation from Mrs. Verepoint, she discovered considerably to her surprise, that she was within ten minutes' walk of the house.

Her resolution was immediately taken, and on she went, well pleased to think that by the promptitude of the manœuvre, she should have a good chance of escaping from the Mount before the fair creature who intended to be its future mistress, returned to

it. She found both the mother and daughter most cordially glad to see her, though a good deal surprised at her mode of getting to them, as it was the first time the ladies of either family had ever ventured upon the experiment.

"I am quite delighted to find that the Mount is within a walk, Julia," said Miss Verepoint, "as it may and must greatly facilitate our meeting. But I presume, my dear, that you do not intend to walk back again?"

"Oh, yes, I do!" replied Julia; "I do not feel in the least fatigued, though I confess I got here without knowing at all what I was about, for I certainly think that Mrs. Dermont would have believed my premature coming of age had led to insanity if I had told her that I contemplated such an excursion."

"And she might well think, my dear, that I was in the same condition, did I suffer you to return on foot."

"Why should she return home at all?" said Charlotte. "The business of coming of

age is all completed, I presume, by this time, and as you ran away from us only for that, and have so very opportunely run back again, I think we should be great geese if we let you escape us again."

"Upon my word, I think so too," said the old lady. "What cause have you to show, my dear, why we should not keep you, now we have got possession?"

"None in the world, my dear Mrs. Verepoint," replied Julia, extremely well pleased to find her wishes so speedily accomplished. "Only, I don't exactly see how I am to dress for dinner."

"And what is our new maid for," said Charlotte, "if she cannot pack up her lady's dresses? If you will please to write your orders to your maid Susan, with whom we already feel so perfectly well acquainted, I will undertake to send them."

"But we must have the maid Susan too, Charlotte," said Mrs. Verepoint. "You may depend upon it that when the colonel decided that Miss Drummond ought to have a maid, he did not intend that she should run

away and leave her Abigail behind her. By far the best way will be to send the carriage over both for the maid and the wardrobe."

It was in vain that Julia protested against giving so much trouble, the mother and daughter both were too really well pleased to have her, for any such formalities to be accepted in the way of obstacle. Julia, therefore, sat down without making any further difficulties, and wrote to Mrs. Dermont relating the fact of her having in her ramblings come upon the Grange without being aware that she was near it, and all the consequences which had followed upon her having mistaken the distance so pleasantly. Nothing could be written with more good-humoured alacrity than the reply, which not only expressed the writer's satisfaction at knowing that her dear Julia was going to renew the pleasure she had enjoyed at her last visit, but rejoiced that she should have timed it so well, as the approaching arrival of their Amelia would prevent their feeling the loss of her society as they must have done at any other time.

CHAPTER VI.

THE beautiful Amelia was by no means sorry to find that Miss Drummond was again absent from the Mount, for not only had she one or two points to gain previously to her marriage, both with Alfred and his parents, but comfortably safe as she felt herself from all possibility of danger from the discovery of her late adventures, she was much better pleased to have no eyes upon her but those which seemed incapable of seeing her but as she wished to be seen, or of judging her, save as she wished to be judged.

As to Julia, she was enjoying herself much more than she had ever expected to do again, and conscious of giving as much plea-

sure as she received, her looks and spirits revived, and her friends reproached themselves with a most extraordinary want of penetration for not having earlier discovered what a treasure they had near them. But they did themselves injustice. Julia never before had been what she was now. Both in person and mind she had been suddenly awakened to a new existence, as if by an enchanter's wand. And herein lies the best excuse for Alfred's blundering preference. Had Julia been, before the fated fête upon the lawn, the same creature that she became afterwards, it is scarcely possible that the blandishments of Amelia Thorwold should have produced the effect they did.

At the Mount, however, every thing seemed to be going on most prosperously, and Julia, if not quite forgotten, was certainly not much thought of by any one. The first two days after Amelia's return were really quite ecstatic days. Alfred literally lived at her feet. Her footstool was his throne, and well inclined was he to exclaim, "Let kings come bow to it." Of course the

colonel and his lady discreetly kept aloof, yet neither were they without their share of enjoyment. The extreme good fortune of having met with such a very beautiful and elegant young woman as a wife for their Alfred, and she too, the grand-daughter and niece of a peer of the realm, was a blessing for which she could not feel too thankful.

The beautiful source of all this happiness was not, however, doomed to share it long without being roused to the recollection of mundane uncertainties by the receipt of a letter which very considerably shook her nerves. Miss Thorwold probably, was not the first young lady who has deprecated the harshly rude and indelicate fashion of presenting people with their letters in presence of an assembled family. Discreet people, indeed, whose minds are ever on the alert to anticipate possible events, and to keep guard over their nerves accordingly, may generally be observed to use considerable caution in their manner of receiving these publicly delivered despatches. Such persons may be seen to put into their pockets, unread, all

letters sealed by a wafer ; and may be observed also, if the address be written in an unknown character, to content themselves for the nonce by a curious examination of that part of the epistle which is addressed rather to the letter-carrier than to themselves, reserving the more personal part of the correspondence till it could be examined without witnesses.

It would be most unjust, in a general way, to accuse Miss Thorwold of any of that very inconsiderate sort of carelessness which leads to the unintentional discovery of private affairs ; but upon the present occasion she felt so completely lapped in security, and so perfectly beyond the reach of any eyes likely to peep at any thing, or to comprehend any thing at which they peeped, if they did peep at all, that she opened a letter, the external features of which were in no degree familiar to her. In short, it was not fastened by a wafer, which would have immediately put her upon her guard, but sealed with an extremely good impression of a true-lover's knot, a symbol in no way

alarming. She opened it and read the first few lines, which sufficed to make her turn as pale as a ghost. The delicate shade of rouge, which, though it harmonised so admirably with her complexion, held no sympathy with her heart, and therefore remained unfaded, only seemed to make her look more unnatural and ghastly. It was less, however, from her own sensations than from the terrified countenance of Alfred, that the unhappy young woman was made conscious how fearfully she was betraying herself. This thought seemed in an instant to turn her trembling nerves to adamant, and, as far as the being perfectly self-possessed could save her, she was no longer in danger. Alfred had flown to her side, and throwing one arm round her waist, seized, with his disengaged hand, the cold, damp fingers of Amelia which held the fatal letter. But the other hand of Amelia was free, and with this she quietly withdrew the letter, and at the same moment suffered her beautiful head to sink upon his bosom, exclaiming, "Oh! dearest Alfred, I feel very ill.

Take me, take me to the window—I want air!”

In an instant the young man had clasped her in his arms, and carried her across the room ; but the window was closed, and while, with the aid of the colonel, who had hastened to his assistance, he threw up the sash, Amelia, by the most natural action in the world, had exchanged the letter for her pocket-handkerchief, the former being safely deposited in her pocket, and the latter pressed against her pallid brow.

Mrs. Dermont, who had felt meanwhile, good lady, as if she ought never to be forgiven for having come down to breakfast without her smelling-bottle, now rushed back into the room with a bottle of pungent salts, which she was about to apply to the nose of the patient, when her hand was gently put aside by that of Amelia, who, looking at her with a smile which was the perfection of sweetness and of languor, said, “Thank you a thousand times, my more than mother ! but the feeling of faintness has entirely passed away. I am quite well

now." And so she was, save a slight sensation of sickness and inward trembling. She had, however, been very near fainting; the catastrophe, which would have been a very dangerous one, having been prevented solely by the startling emotion produced upon her by the terrified aspect of her lover. This look had roused her as effectually as a bucket of cold water poured over her head could have done, and from that moment she was no longer in any danger of betraying her own secrets.

"I am sadly afraid that I have frightened you all," said she, with one of her own fascinating smiles.

"You have received some bad news I fear, my dear child," said the good colonel, looking at her very tenderly.

"Oh ! no," she replied, once more smiling, nay, almost laughing at the idea. "But I certainly do not wonder at your thinking so. I certainly felt very near fainting, a symptom of weakness that is very rare with me; but I can easily account for it. Do you remember how perseveringly I walked last

night with Alfred on the terrace? We were both of us so deeply occupied by looking at the moon, that we quite forgot how late it was. I may confess now, that when I went to bed I felt over-fatigued; and as I did not sleep well, the same feeling of fatigue hung about me this morning. You must take better care of me, Alfred, in future."

The lamentations and protestations, the hopes and the fears, the sorrow and the joy which followed, may easily be imagined; and when all this was pretty well over, and the breakfast too, Amelia whispered to Alfred that she should like to lie quietly down on a certain comfortable sofa in the library, and have him come and read to her. This was by no means a novel mode of their passing the morning, particularly during the absence of Julia, and a few words from Alfred to his father and mother secured the undisturbed possession of the apartment.

Amelia permitted the happy Alfred to install her on the sofa, and to place himself on a low arm-chair beside it; but when at length, having completed all imaginable and

unimaginable contrivances for her comfort, he smilingly inquired what book they should read, she half raised herself from her recumbent position, and, turning her lovely face towards him, while one hand rested on his shoulder, and the other supported her ivory forehead, she said, "It is my heart, Alfred, that you must read, and no other volume till I have opened every page of that !"

"Adored Amelia!" exclaimed the young man, seizing the hand that rested on his shoulder, and devouring it with kisses—"Adored Amelia! Yes, dearest, yes! Talk to me of yourself, your angel self, and I will listen, Amelia, till I forget all other themes."

"My dear, dear Alfred!" she replied, "I never knew, I never guessed, how inexpressibly dear you were to my heart, till I became aware that it was possible, oh! more than possible, that I might lose you—that we might be parted, Alfred; parted for ever!"

"Parted, Amelia! Gracious heaven! what do you mean to say to me? Who is there, what is there, then, can part us? , The hand

of death may do it; but nothing else can—nothing else, unless it be your own cruel will, Amelia.”

“And my cruel will it never can be, my beloved Alfred!” she replied, in an accent of passionate fondness. “Yet my sinking heart tells me that part we must. It was the pang which this thought brought with it that blanched my cheek and stopped the beating of my heart this morning, Alfred. And had I not struggled against the weakness then, all would now be over between us; but sudden strength seemed given me, that I might conceal that dreadful letter from your parents, till we had laid our heads and hearts together in the hope—alas! in the vain, vain hope, perhaps, that we might together be able to devise some means for escaping the misery of a separation.”

“Escaping it!” exclaimed Alfred, with vehemence. “Who dares to say that there is, that there can be any such danger? Do I not love you, Amelia? And if I do, what but your own will can part us? But keep me no longer in suspense. Where is the

letter? What does it contain, that can threaten the happiness of two beings who love, and who are about to be indissolubly united for life? Show me this bugbear of a letter, Amelia. I do not fear it."

"You shall see it, Alfred; you shall see it, after a short explanation from me. And then—it is from you, dear love, that I must hear my destiny—I will permit no other voice to pronounce it, Alfred."

"Then you are my wife, Amelia!" he rejoined, passionately throwing his arms around her, and pressing her to his bosom. "Keep but your promise of leaving the decision with me, and not all the letters that ever were written can part us."

For one short moment of very touching softness, Miss Thorwold permitted her drooping head to rest upon his shoulder. Then, breathing a heavy sigh, she gently disengaged herself from his arms, and said, with great solemnity and steadiness: "I am to blame, dear Alfred, for thus yielding to weakness, at a moment when strength is very necessary. Now listen to me, my dearest, dearest

friend!—listen to me with your best and coolest judgment, for so only can you help me, if, indeed, help be still possible. That letter, Alfred, is from a London lawyer, threatening me with instant arrest, and an immediate removal to prison, if I do not immediately find the means of paying into his hands the sum of thirteen hundred pounds.”

“Is it a just claim, Amelia?” said the young man, slightly colouring, but not looking by many degrees so much dismayed as he might have done had he possessed about a dozen years’ more experience of the world and its ways.

“I believe it is, dear Alfred,” replied the young lady, considerably comforted by the tone of the inquiry.

“And how was it contracted, my sweet love? And why has not the impertinent fellow sent it to your uncle, instead of audaciously intruding himself upon you here? How was it contracted, Amelia?”

“Therein, my dearest love, lies the difficulty,” she replied. “The large amount will at once show you that it is not likely

to be for any expenses of my own. And indeed, were this possible, which of course it is not, but if this *were* possible, there would be no difficulty in the business whatever, for my uncle, after scolding me a little for my extravagance, perhaps, would pay it instantly, and I should hear no more about it; but, most unhappily, the debt has been incurred for one whom but to name in the presence of Lord Ripley is an offence which he has again and again declared to every body connected with him, that he never will forgive."

"Then how, dearest, have you been led to become responsible for the debts of a person so deeply reprobated by your uncle?"

"Ay, there's the rub, Alfred, and this is the point on which I want to open my heart to you. Lord Ripley, as you well know, has but one legitimate child, the Honourable Mr. Thorwold, his only son and heir. But he has, though few know any thing about it, and nobody ever mentions the subject,—he has, Alfred, a natural daughter, several years older than his son. When my mother, who

survived my poor father but a few years, died, I was taken into the house of my uncle, which has continued to be my home ever since. His establishment consists of two houses, one in London, the other in Cornwall. Of this country-house my uncle used to be passionately fond, and as long as he continued to care about his yacht, he passed all the summer months there, or else on board. But Lady Ripley detested both the house and the yacht, and took especial care to visit neither the one nor the other. Lady Ripley, you know, is no aunt of mine, and as nothing belonging to her lord is particularly dear to her, she never felt any very partial affection for me. The consequence of this was, that I was more at the country-house than the town one, to which arrangement I certainly owe my decided preference for the country. While in Cornwall I formed a strong, alas! a very strong attachment to the natural daughter of my uncle, who certainly was very strongly attached to me also. She constantly resided at her father's house in Cornwall, and she made my life, while I re-

mained there with her, one of unceasing joy, and I might safely say of unceasing improvement too. For she had been most carefully educated, and was never so happy as when instructing me. This happy intercourse continued till I was eighteen, and then, poor dear creature, she married. It is needless for me to enter at length into all the circumstances of this most unhappy marriage. It is enough to say that the man, instead of being, as my uncle supposed, extremely well off, turned out to be little better than a swindler; but his poor wife, who was most devotedly attached to him, never did, nor ever would believe that he was unworthy, and her continued adherence to him so irritated her father, that it ended by a quarrel, which was never made up. Her misery under this, and all her other misfortunes, was more than her health could bear; she fell into a lingering decline, which terminated in her death, and it was during her last illness that this terrible debt was contracted. Her worthless husband had been arrested and dragged to prison, and it

was her dreadful agonies under this infliction which induced me, the very day after I came of age, to put my name to the bill upon which this claim is founded. Now, Alfred, you know all."

"And this all, my dearest life, only adds, if indeed, it were possible, to my devoted, my idolizing affection for you! But why, my beloved, should you suffer this application to alarm your spirits so severely? I cannot doubt that a single word from you to Lord Ripley would induce him to release you from it instantly. You have only to sit down immediately, and write to him, my dearest Amelia, and the disagreeable business will be over. One word will suffice."

"Yes, Alfred," replied Miss Thorwold in the calm accent of despair, "one word *would* suffice. It would suffice to make his stern and steadfast lordship throw me from him for ever, as he did his deserving daughter before. Alas! Alfred, you know him not! Lord Ripley has many high and noble qualities, but he is implacable, and a resolution once taken and avowed, he has never

yet been known to change. He long ago told me that if he ever discovered the slightest disobedience on my part to the injunction he had so solemnly laid upon me, never to hold intercourse with his unfortunate daughter, he would never see, never hold communion with me more."

Alfred looked distressed, and for a minute or two seemed embarrassed how to answer; but at length he said, "If this indeed be so, if this severe opinion of your uncle be just, you must of course apply to my father, my dear Amelia. I can easily imagine, dearest, that the doing so will be disagreeable to you. But I see no alternative."

"Then, Alfred," she replied, clasping her hands, and raising her beautiful eyes to Heaven, as if there only she could look for aid — "then, Alfred, I must prepare my mind for the worst. Nor will I shrink from it, if I can see you, my best-beloved, prepared to meet it also. Alfred! I must go to prison."

"Go to prison, Amelia, in preference to throwing yourself upon the assured kindness

of my excellent father? I cannot, I will not, I do not believe it, Amelia."

"Most sad will be the task of convincing you, dearest, that you are mistaken," she replied, with a look of ineffable tenderness, and with an accent which seemed to announce a resolute submission to suffering, which it was quite heart-breaking to witness in one so gentle-looking, and so beautiful.

"Not only sad, but impossible, my love," replied Alfred, with a tender smile. "I understand you now, my sweet Amelia! You shrink, dearest, from the task of repeating the sad story to him, and it is, therefore, I, my love, who must do it for you."

"Gracious Heaven!" exclaimed Amelia, suddenly rising from the sofa, and standing before him with clasped hands, and the most vehement expression of agony on her countenance. "Would you betray me? Have I trusted you for this? Have I opened every throbbing pulse of my breaking heart before your eyes, and do you reward me for this last, best proof of devoted love, by threaten-

ing to disclose to your father a secret upon which more than my life seems to hang?"

Having uttered these words in a voice which trembled, as it seemed, between terror and sorrow, she threw herself upon her knees beside the sofa, and stretching her arms across it, buried her face upon them.

Inexpressibly distressed, Alfred kneeled down beside her, and besought her, in the tenderest accents, not to give way to a degree of vehement despair, which was wholly disproportionate to the evil she feared.

"You must not dress my dear, good, gentle-tempered father in the attributes of your harsh-minded uncle, Amelia. If you will only consent to go up-stairs, and lay down upon the bed for half an hour, I will engage that before we meet again I will have arranged the whole affair to your satisfaction. Will you let me manage it? Will you thus far confide in me?"

"No, sir, I will not," said Amelia, rising from her recumbent position, and standing before him in all the touching severity of

outraged confidence. "I have confided in you!" And here her voice was almost choked with sobs. "I have confided in you, Alfred, with all the undoubting trust of perfect love, and my reward is the being threatened with the repetition of my dreadful tale to the very individual, who, beyond all others in the world, is the very, very last to whom I would disclose it! You have my secret, sir: the fatal words that told it can never be recalled. But think not that I will ever see you more. My resolution is taken. I shall submit myself without one single struggle more to the power of the law. Here is the attorney's letter, Mr. Dermont. Perhaps you may be able to tell me to what prison I shall be conveyed, if the arrest takes place here—No! no! Not here, Alfred! Your father's house shall not be disgraced by me. I will appoint a meeting with this man and his officials, at some lone spot, roofed only by the vault of heaven, and be conveyed thence to the sheltering walls which shall henceforth hide me from every eye. They shall not need bars and bolts to keep me! Once entered

there, I will never pass through its gates again alive."

The agony of Alfred was great beyond description, being much increased by perceiving that the eye of Amelia had a wildness of misery in its expression, which seemed to threaten frenzy. But for this, indeed, it is possible, just possible, that the inflated vehemence of her language, and the utter defiance of common sense manifested by her angry refusal of what appeared the only available means of saving her, *might* have suggested the idea of acting; but she was much too accomplished an artist for this. Nothing, indeed, could be more nicely hit off than the degree of unreasonableness which she displayed; for while it saved her from the charge of being sufficiently herself to be quite answerable for all the passionate words she uttered, there was quite enough of reason left to make it very obviously dangerous to irritate her trembling nerves by opposition. To soothe her, therefore, became the first, and almost the only object of her greatly distressed lover. He gently took

her hand, and leading her back to the sofa, and seating her upon it, fell upon his knees before her, and looking at her with eyes which spoke all the fond devotion of his soul, he implored her, by the love she bore him, (poor fellow !) to tell him what she would herself think it would be best for him to do.

This question, and the look of undoubting devotion which accompanied it, appeared to do more towards restoring her tranquillity and self-possession, than any thing he had yet said.

"Heaven bless you, dearest love !" she replied, bending forward, and impressing a kiss upon his forehead. " You must forgive me, my Alfred, if the shock which this letter has given me has proved too much for my firmness. It is not very often, I believe, that I thus permit myself to give way to feeling. No human beings can, in my opinion, really do their duty in life, unless they school themselves into such a degree of firmness as shall enable their mental resources to have fair play in every emergency which may befall them. I am fain to confess, dearest

Alfred, that this has not been the case with me this morning. There was something so new, so entirely unexpected in the direful occurrence,—for I fully believed that my putting my name was little more than a mere form, that my courage, nay, my very intellect seemed to give way under it ! But your affection, your true sympathy, my beloved Alfred, has restored me to myself, and I now feel able to consult with you on what it will be best to do, with something like reason and common sense.—You still, I think, want a month or two of being of age, dear Alfred ?”

“Yes, dearest,” he replied, “I want five months of it ; but were it otherwise, my love, I could not relieve you from this claim without the assistance of my father. Beyond the allowance that he makes me, I have nothing ; and though this allowance is to be augmented to the half of his entire income, from the day when I receive this dear hand, I should fear to engage for the payment of this sum in less than three or four years, my sweet love, lest the doing so might

render necessary a degree of economy which would interfere with your comfort."

"And with yours too, dearest Alfred," she replied, endeavouring so to modulate her voice, as not to betray quite all the satisfaction she felt at having brought matters to so comfortable a tone of consultation. "I should be miserable, my beloved Alfred, were I to witness any privation, on your part, sufficiently severe to be of any real inconvenience. No, dearest! As it is but too evident that the money must be paid directly, it must, of course, be borrowed, Alfred, and my heart assures me, dear love, that the paying interest upon the sum, while gradually paying off the principal by our little domestic savings, will be considered as a work of love, by you, my Alfred, which will have more pleasure than pain in it."

"It most surely would, my sweet Amelia," he returned, while the shadows of an anxious thought or two passed across his features. "It most surely would; but unfortunately, dearest, it is not in the repayment of either interest or principal that the

difficulty lies, but in the act of borrowing. Were I of age, I have no doubt that if we could gain sufficient time to look about a little, this might easily be found upon my covenanting to pay good interest; but, as it is, my signature is, I believe, not worth a shilling."

"I know it, my dear Alfred," said Amelia, briskly, "and my fate is sealed, unless you can apply to some one who would feel your word to be worth more than your bond. None but a true and real friend, who knows you well, Alfred, can be of any use to us at this trying moment. Have you none such?"

"I believe there may be several, Amelia, who would not fear to trust me on my word," he replied; "but all these are my friends only because they are the friends of my father, and, of course, therefore, were I to make this startling application to them, my father would be instantly made acquainted with it. Would it not then be better, my dear love, that he should himself be the person applied to?"

Miss Thorwold knit her brows, and

seemed for a moment in danger of relapsing into an alarming degree of agitation; but she quickly recovered herself, and said in a tone that was almost playful, "Ah! Alfred, I suspect that you are less perfect as a friend, than as a lover. In the latter capacity, I do freely confess that I should not like to see any very material alteration; but were I your friend, Alfred, I should be apt to think that you wanted the perfect confidence which friendship ought to give."

"As how, dearest?" said he.

"As how?" she replied. "What do you imagine dear Julia Drummond would think of you, could she know that much more than the life of the woman you love depended upon your having, for a short time, the use of thirteen hundred pounds, and that you scrupled to ask her to lend it to you?"

"Julia Drummond?" said Alfred colouring violently. "Oh! no. I should not choose to take the money from Julia Drummond."

There was more than one reason why

this answer grated very disagreeably on the ear of Miss Thorwold. There was something in its tone which seemed to say that Julia Drummond was a personage that was to be kept sacred and apart, let what would happen to the rest of the world. There was, moreover, a good deal of decision in the tone, sounding very much as if the gentleman could, upon occasion, even in her presence, have a will of his own. And, worst of all, there was, for the moment at least, an evident forgetfulness of all the woe which threatened the only woman he had any business to care for, in case he did not, by some means or other, obtain possession of thirteen hundred pounds, and lay it at her feet immediately.

For a moment she paused, without making any reply whatever, being doubtful whether she should fall into an hysteric paroxysm of jealous fury, or meekly yield herself to the doom to which he consigned her, and declare herself prepared for an eternal separation and a prison. Miss Thorwold was already

a good deal fatigued, and it might have been for this reason that she decided upon the last.

“Let us quit the subject, Mr. Dermont,” said she; “it is evidently useless to my interest to dwell upon it, and the only possible effect of prolonging this dreadful interview, will be to render me altogether incapable of going with tolerable resolution through the terrific scenes which are before me. For me to know you have the power to save me, and yet that you decline to do it is, after all, perhaps, the best preparation for our parting—the best, or at least the most effectual way of enabling me to bid you an eternal farewell, without sinking under—” but here her voice was suffocated by so passionate a burst of tears, that she threw herself sideways upon the sofa on which she sat, hiding her agitated features upon the cushions. Some accident, as she thus lay prone, and utterly subdued by sorrow, occasioned the comb which fastened her hair, to escape from its office, and the whole of the magnificently beautiful mass fell over her shoulders in dis-

order, and literally swept the ground with its silken tresses.

When gentlemen rising twenty-one are violently in love for the first time in their lives, every new position into which the adored object puts herself is apt to produce a fresh rising and kindling of the flame, like an additional handful of light fuel thrown upon a fire already bright enough. The sight of the beautiful Miss Thorwold in this attitude of woe, enveloped in her silken veil of hair was more than Alfred could stand; and when, in addition to this, he heard the sobs which the thoughts of parting from him drew from her tender bosom, his soul was so completely subdued within him, that he literally had no longer the power of refusing any thing she asked.

"Amelia! Amelia!" he exclaimed, again throwing himself on his knees beside her, "spare me, I beseech you, the agony of seeing you thus sunk in sorrow, and that more bitter still of hearing you talk of our parting, as if it were possible. Amelia! it is not possible! It is not possible that I

should lose you and live. Look up, my love! Let me once again bask in the sunshine of those lovely eyes, and by all my precious hopes of calling you mine I swear, that there is nothing you can ask, which I will not be ready to do. Speak, tell me, explain to me your wishes and your will and I will obey you, let it be what it may that you require. Only let me look again in that sweet face, let me hear you call me your beloved Alfred! Let me hear you promise that you will be mine for ever!"

Thus conjured up, the beautiful creature gently, slowly, coyly stole towards him as he knelt, and having reached his bosom, nestled her head into it, and as if this were not sufficient to subdue him to the most abject slavery, she completed the work by throwing her arms around him. She felt him tremble with emotion as he returned her embrace, and she knew that it was now the time to speak, and settle the business at once.

"My Alfred!" she exclaimed, in the siren sounds of melting tenderness, "my Alfred!

my beloved Alfred! never again let me endure the dreadful anguish of believing that any sentiment exists in your heart stronger than your love for me! Oh, Alfred! How much rather would I die now, believing myself wholly beloved, even as I love you, than linger through long years of life in doubt of it."

"Oh! doubt it not! Doubt it not, my angel love!" he replied, impressing the most impassioned kisses on her lips. "Try me, Amelia! Ask what you will, dictate what you will, and if I refuse to comply, banish me from your presence for ever."

"Then hear me, my affianced husband, hear me," she replied, gently repulsing his caresses, and replacing herself in an attitude better suited for rational conversation, "and think not that I will ask any thing that you can reasonably object to grant. You cannot have forgotten your dear father's gay description of the dignity he had been conferring upon our little friend Julia, as he playfully called her, by giving her to understand, not only that she was now in full pos-

session of her pretty little fortune, but also that she had the power, by a stroke of her pen, of making ducks and drakes of it whenever she liked. Now I am not going to propose that she should make ducks and drakes of it, my Alfred. Heaven forbid! Heartily do I hope that through long years of life you will watch over and protect both her and her fortune. What I do propose is far different. Go to her, Alfred; go to her, my dear husband, and guarding from every earthly ear, and of course from her's, poor dear young thing, among the rest, the name of the woman, whom, though she had the weakness of suffering her affectionate heart to be imposed upon, you still mean to make your wife. Guarding this name with all a husband's tender care, address her frankly with a petition that she would lend you for a few years, on interest, the sum of thirteen hundred pounds. Should she have the childish indiscretion of inquiring for what purpose you want this money, tell her that the time will probably come when you shall no longer wish to conceal this from her, but

that at present it cannot be disclosed; and you may add, Alfred, that your only reason for applying to her, in preference to your father, is your feeling certain that in her case this inquiry would not be persevered in, after your acknowledging that it was painful to you. Will you do this, Alfred, for the love of me?"

A question asked in such a form was not at that moment likely to meet a negative: besides which, Alfred had pledged himself to obey her, by a promise that no degree of averseness to its fulfilment could have tempted him to break. He therefore instantly, and solemnly replied, "Amelia, I will."

"Then lose not an instant," she said, suddenly rising. "Every second is of importance, if you mean to save me from the exposure which I dread so greatly worse than death."

"If, Amelia!" he said, in an accent of tender reproach.

"No, no, there is no if, my love!" she rejoined, advancing her beautiful lips to re-

ceive the kiss which was to seal the transaction. But oh! to horse, to horse, my Alfred! Speed, not *if*, but *as* you love me!"

The young man ardently kissed her, once, twice, thrice; and then throwing forward his arm with an action which seemed to promise the speed she asked for, he darted out of the room in silence, in order the more eloquently to prove that he would not allow himself to pause even long enough to say adieu.

Amelia watched him as he went; she watched the door close after him; she listened for, and she heard his rapidly departing steps through the hall, and then she quietly turned to a looking-glass, and put her disordered tresses in order. Having done this, she stretched her arms, and yawned violently, and then, as she walked towards the door, in order to change that apartment for her own, where she might more uninterruptedly resign herself to the perfect repose her exertions both required and merited, she murmured with a languid

smile, "It was rather hard work, to be sure, and yet, had I known when I last visited my rapacious dressmaker, how speedily I should have discovered the means of settling her account, I most certainly would have indulged myself in one or two more of the delicious articles I so vehemently longed for."

CHAPTER VII.

LUCKILY for Alfred the ride from the Mount to the Grange was a very short one, even at an ordinary pace, but, riding as he rode, the ground was passed over before he had time to meditate on what he was about, which, as he was quite determined to do it *bon gré, mal gré*, was fortunate, as it made the entering upon his task a matter of less difficulty than it might otherwise have been. It was not his object to be shown into Mrs. Verepoint's drawing-room, for this would have inflicted upon him the necessity of asking Julia to accompany him into another apartment, an awkwardness which he greatly wished to avoid, and he therefore told the

servant who admitted him, that he wished to see Miss Drummond for a moment, and would be much obliged if she would come down to him.

The man replied by opening the door of the library, saying: "If you will walk in here, sir, I will tell Miss Drummond immediately." But as soon as the door was fairly opened the man perceived that his errand was already done, for there stood Julia alone, busily engaged in seeking a volume which she wanted.

"This is a piece of good luck, Julia," he said, "for I wanted to see you for five minutes alone."

He said this in the easiest and most natural tone possible, and in the easiest and most natural tone possible Julia answered him with a smiling assurance that she was very happy to see him. So far the impetus given him by his scene with Amelia had carried him towards the end he had to reach, and like the gallop of a bold, bad coachman down a hill, sent him for a short distance up the opposite hill, at the same pace. But having proceeded thus far he began to feel,

poor fellow, that it was indeed a very uphill path he had to go, and though he did not actually jib, he stopped.

"Well! Alfred," said Julia, who rightly divined that whatever he had to tell her must be about Amelia, "well, what is it you have to tell me?"

"To tell you, Julia?" he replied, with a heavy sigh. "No, I do not come to tell you any thing, I come to perform a very painful, nay, I must confess it, a very difficult task; I come to ask a favour of you."

"And is that a painful and a difficult task, my dear Alfred? I do not think it could be any thing but a pleasure to me to grant any thing you could ask, but your telling me that the asking it is a pain, is enough to destroy the pleasure, if any thing could," replied Julia, fixing her eyes upon the open volume she held in her hand, that he might not see the tears which she felt were filling her eyes.

"God bless you, my dear and ever-kind friend," said he, desperately determined to say what he had to say before she should speak again, for there was something so

sweetly confiding in her voice and look, that he dreaded the telling her that she must ask no questions, still more than asking her to begin the duck and drake process upon her little fortune; "God bless you, Julia! I know I am a fool for dreading to tell a friend so every way indulgent, that I want her to lend me some money."

"Lend you money, my dearest Alfred!" she replied, looking and feeling inexpressibly delighted, "how very glad I am to hear it! I have at this very moment in my writing desk at home more money than I have any idea what to do with. You may take it all, and welcome. Here is the key of the desk," she added, disengaging a little key that was fastened to her watch-chain," and you may keep it till I come home again; I really never thought that the having money could give me so much pleasure."

The face of poor Alfred became as red as scarlet. "My dear, dear Julia!" he replied, "can you not now conceive it must be painful to me to tell you, that no sum you can by possibility have in your desk can be sufficient

for what I want? Julia ! I have immediate need, most urgent need of thirteen hundred pounds."

It was now Julia's turn to colour, and she did so very beautifully, but it was wholly and solely because by talking of the money she had in her desk, she had given Alfred the pain of declaring that it was not enough ; but the charming simplicity and unbounded confidence of her manner soon set it all right again.

"What a fool I am !" she exclaimed, "but you must excuse me, dearest Alfred ; I know so little, so absolutely nothing about money, that a very little seems to me enough for every thing. I really am quite ashamed of myself, as if it could be worth while for you to ask for what my guardian gave for my little wants and wishes. Thank goodness however, there is no time lost by my blundering, for you have only to give my love to my guardian and tell him, that he is to let you have out of my money exactly as much as you want, and that he must do it in the

quick way he told me of, this very day, without losing a post."

"But my father can no longer regulate the disposal of your money, Julia," replied Alfred, in a faltering voice; "as you are now of age, it is only your own signature that can avail."

"But what am I to sign, Alfred?—Oh! I remember now all about the power of attorney. How in the world can I manage to get such a thing? I don't even know very well what it is. And it is so vexing, Alfred, if you want it directly, that so much time must be lost! Gallop home as fast as ever you can, and ask your father to write to old Mr. Wood; that is the person he told me must do it, and he may send me the letter, if it is proper for me to sign it, or I will walk home across the fields to sign it there, if you think it will be the quickest way. Say, Alfred, shall I set off directly?"

Poor Alfred! Notwithstanding all this eager kindness, the worst part of his task still remained undone. He felt that it must be so much easier for Julia to comprehend

that he might want money, than that he should want it secretly! But she must be made to understand this, or all he had yet done would be greatly worse than useless.

"No, Julia, no," he said. "It is not only yourself who must sign this letter to the broker, requesting him to send you a power of attorney, but you must also write it yourself. In short, my dearest Julia, my father must never, *never* know it."

The bright glow of affectionate pleasure, which had lighted up her countenance, faded at once. "Oh! Alfred!" she exclaimed, "what a pity! He is so very, very kind! And he does love you so very, very dearly! Think better of it, my dearest Alfred—think how very impossible it is that he should be angry with you. Do you not feel that it is impossible?"

This was an appeal that he found it very difficult to answer. Painful as he had felt it must be to ask her for this money, without telling her why he wanted it, he had not anticipated any difficulty from it, for he felt perfectly sure that her delicacy of character

would prevent her appearing at all desirous of knowing more than he should tell her; but he had not foreseen the embarrassment which now beset him, and yet it was the most natural thing in the world that Julia should exert her very utmost power to prevent his doing any thing that could be construed into ingratitude to his indulgent father. He knew not how to answer her, and having pulled out his pocket-handkerchief three times, and walked up and down the room twice, he suddenly placed himself before her, and said, "Julia! spare me on this point, I conjure you. Indeed, I am not so much to blame as you think me. I have no power, no right." He stopped short, feeling that this line of defence might lead him a great deal further than he intended to go.

But he had already gone far enough. Julia made no further remonstrance, and merely said: "Of course, Alfred, I do not mean to dictate to you. Just tell me the words I ought to write, and it shall be done directly."

Had Alfred been aware how perfectly

certain Julia felt that he was borrowing her money for the use of Miss Thorwold, he might not have been able so honestly to assure that young lady, upon his return, that he had managed the affair most successfully and completely according to her instructions, as he did. Both his words and manner were, however, perfectly satisfactory to her. So was the celerity with which the business was brought to a conclusion; and the lawyer's receipt for the various sums he had undertaken to collect, lodged in her writing-desk; and this great and ever-harassing danger passed and over, she shook her ambrosial locks, clapped her triumphant hands together in private, and thanked her beauty, her talents, and her good star.

There certainly did appear at this juncture, to be a tide in the affairs of Miss Thorwold; and that it was at the flood, leading her on at a most satisfactory rate to the fortune she had assigned for herself, could hardly be doubted; for the very next morning, after the conclusion of the borrowing and paying transaction, a large brown-paper

parcel, directed to Colonel Dermont, arrived by the mail, which, on being opened, was found to contain the impatiently awaited settlements, all fairly engrossed and ready for signing.

Alfred's delight as he saw them, seized upon them, and held them in his eager grasp, had certainly a good deal of boyish glee in it, and the fair and wise Amelia turned away her beautiful head, that the amusement which the ecstasies of her young lover occasioned her might not be perceived.

All now was joyous bustle and confusion at the Mount. Measures had long ago been taken for the immediate solemnisation of the marriage, as soon as these necessary and important documents should arrive ; and little, therefore, save the actual preparation of the wedding banquet, and the announcing to the guests who had promised to be present at it, that the day was at length fixed, remained to be done. The marriage of Colonel Dermont's heir, however, was not an event to be performed in private. As large a party of their more intimate neighbours were in-

vited as could be conveniently accommodated, the more distant guests being, on this great and joyful occasion, contented, nay, delighted, whether ladies or gentlemen, married or single, to be lodged in best rooms or bachelors' rooms, as the chance might be, and feeling superlatively happy and flattered, if they could only be lodged at all.

Some few near neighbours, indeed, who were sufficiently intimate to be permitted to assist on the joyful occasion, offered rooms in their houses for the distant guests, and this was a great accommodation.

Mrs. Knight was, of course, one of the first to volunteer her services; and not only Lord Ripley, but one or two other dear fashionable friends of the bride, and among the rest her two bridesmaids, were to be received at Crosby, and make their full-dressed appearance at the Mount, at an early hour on the morning of the happy day. Mrs. Verepoint, too, thoughtfully suggested that Miss Drummond's room might be very useful, and therefore strongly urged her new fa-

avourite, Julia, to remain at the Grange till after the wedding party had dispersed; attending the ceremony, and the banquet which was to follow it, with them.

Julia, who would have joyfully lodged herself during the whole affair in the very darkest dungeon that ever was formed, so that she might have escaped being its witness, very gratefully accepted the prolonged invitation; and as no one at the Mount made any objection to it, the matter was speedily settled.

Some discussion, but of the most friendly kind, arose respecting the scene of the nuptial festivities; Mrs. Knight pleading for her right to act in *loco parentis* to the bride, but permitting this right to be set aside, in compliance with the earnest entreaties of Colonel and Mrs. Drummond. In short, every thing went on in the most agreeable manner possible. The very finest breakfast that ever was given was in preparation; grapes and pines were to be as plenty as gooseberries and currants at a summer fair; grouse was

to fly to them with railroad speed from Scotland, and every covert in the county held itself honoured by being permitted to contribute its contingent of pheasants and partridges. Gunter's idle autumn stoves were put into active service; and as to flowers, whole acres might have been thickly strewn with the blossoms of rare beauty, which were carefully watched and kept in readiness for this great occasion.

There was but one single circumstance which occurred during this last week of joyous preparation, which had any tendency to check the general joy; and even this was not suffered to affect more than two individuals, all mention of it being carefully avoided by those two, excepting between themselves, in order to prevent any vexatious thought of any kind from sullyng the brightness of the general joy.

The day after the arrival of the marriage settlements, another despatch from his lawyer was delivered to Colonel Dermont at the breakfast-table, the perusal of which seemed to give him much satisfaction.

"Any commands for the Grange, Mrs. Dermont?" said he. "I am going to ride over immediately after breakfast."

"Yes, indeed, colonel, I have commands," replied Mrs. Dermont, "and very glad I shall be to escape the inconvenience of sending on purpose. You must be sure to see Julia, if you please, and tell her, with my love, that she must send me over Susan directly. She has not been very long used to her services, you know, and therefore I don't suppose she will want her much for the next day or two. And tell her to let her come directly, for the job I want her for must be done at once."

Colonel Dermont replied that he should be sure to see Julia, and would not fail to deliver the message immediately.

Julia indeed was the only person he wished to see on the present occasion, as he had matters of real business to speak of, and he therefore only inquired for her.

"Both the young ladies are in the garden, colonel," answered the man.

"Then go there after them, Richard, and

tell Miss Drummond that I wish to speak to her for five minutes in the library."

The message was delivered, and the summons obeyed without loss of time, and the colonel proved himself a trusty messenger, by executing his lady's errand, before he attended to his own.

"I shall be delighted if she can be useful," said Julia, eagerly, "and I will go out and send her off directly, sir, if you will give me leave?"

"Do so, my dear, and then our consciences will be at rest in that matter. But come back to me as soon as you can."

In a few minutes Julia returned with the satisfactory intelligence that Susan was already on her way, and Colonel Dermont then opened the weightier business which brought him there, by saying, "Now, Julia, I am going to prove to you that coming of age is really a serious affair, when the possession of money comes with it, and that it will be necessary that you should attend to me very seriously, in order that you should perfectly understand what I am going to say to you."

Julia coloured, as she recollected how very little she had understood of the last business which her coming of age had brought upon her, but she answered with a smile, that she would try to be as little stupid as she possibly could.

“ Well, my dear, I think that may do,” replied her indulgent friend. “ You remember, I hope, all I said to you when we settled our accounts together, about my being sorry that the interest you got from your money was so small, and that I hoped that I should be able to put you in the way of making it better. Do you remember all this, my dear ?”

“ Yes, sir,” replied Julia, in rather a faint voice. “ Yes, sir, I do.”

“ Well then, my dear, what I come for now, is to tell you that my good friend Wright has managed the business admirably for us. He has got a mortgage with a security as firm as a freehold can make it. You are to have five per cent. for your money, Julia, which will make a very great difference in your little income, and you are to

receive the interest half-yearly. Wright will receive it for you, so you will have no trouble or difficulty whatever, my dear. There was one trifling obstacle, but Wright, like a sensible fellow as he is, got over that at once, without running the risk of losing such a capital good thing by waiting till he could apply to me. This difficulty was that the money required was just three hundred pounds more than you have got, Julia. That is to say that the sum wanted was eleven thousand, and you have got you know, with all my savings, only ten thousand seven hundred; but old Wright knew that I should be able and willing to lend you the odd three hundred, my dear, and so he settled the business at once—and now all you have got to do is to sign this power of attorney which he has sent down, and when you have done so, I will forward it to Mr. Wood, my broker, who will sell the money out, and place it in the hands of Mr. Wright. Here is a pen and ink, Julia—and here is where you are to put your name.”

Julia heard and understood every word

he said, nevertheless she had been earnestly pondering in her mind during the greater part of the time he had been speaking, what would be the best way of informing this kindly active friend that she had already put it out of her own power to act as he advised her to do.

“I have two things to attend to,” thought Julia, with a degree of clearness which really did her credit, considering how violently her heart was beating. “The first is to confess that I am no longer possessed of ten thousand seven hundred pounds, and the next is to refuse to tell him what I have done with the deficiency.” Both tasks were difficult and disagreeable, but the necessity of the case gave her firmness, and gently putting aside the pen which he held ready for her, she said, “I fear you will be very angry with me, Colonel Dermont, but I am no longer in possession of the sum you made over to me. I have already spent thirteen hundred pounds of it.”

“Spent thirteen hundred pounds in less than three weeks, Miss Julia Drummond?”

cried the colonel, staring at her with more incredulity than anger. "You really must excuse me, young lady, if I confess that I don't believe a word of it. You are either making a joke, you foolish child, or else you have some very dangerous notion in your thoughts, that makes you prefer keeping the ready money in your own hands. Tell me the truth at once, Julia?"

"The truth will, I well know, make you very angry, dear sir. I have lent the money to a friend, and I have pledged my solemn promise not to disclose the transaction to you."

"Not to disclose the transaction to me!" repeated the colonel. "And who can the precious scoundrel be who made this a condition with you? And were you, and are you, such a perfect idiot, Julia, as not to perceive that this condition alone stamps your friend as a villain? Answer this question honestly—does not this desire to separate you from the protection of the only friend you have in the world, prove him to be a villain?"

“ Oh ! no, no, no,” replied Julia, bursting into tears, and wounded to the very soul at hearing such a judgment (apparently, too, so just) passed upon the conduct of Alfred; “ no, sir, no, he is not a villain.”

Colonel Dermont looked earnestly in her face for a minute or two, and then said, sighing deeply, “ Oh ! Julia, Julia ! this mystery most unhappily clears up another. It is now only too easy for me to understand why it was you refused, with such strange and vehement precipitation, the proposal of Mr. Borrowdale. It is but too plain that, young as you are, your affections have been seduced by some unworthy wretch, who dares not avow himself to your friends. Have pity upon yourself, my poor child !—for your own sake, Julia, stop short in this dreadful, this disgraceful career. My poor, dear girl, you are in the high road to destruction ; and though your grandfather saved my life, Julia, you won’t let me do any thing to save you.”

Tears stood in the good colonel’s eyes as he said this; and there was so much more

of sorrow than of anger in his manner, that the unfortunate girl was deeply affected, and wept bitterly.

“ No wonder you weep, Julia,” said he, “ and I would that I knew how to save you from yourself ; but I am at a loss, quite at a loss, my poor child. If I could form any guess as to who the villain is that has thus beguiled you ! It is as clear to me as that the sun gives light, that the same sentiment which made you refuse Borrowdale, made you thus madly give away your property to one whose name you dare not mention ; but who this can be—who it is possible you can have seen and known, thus secretly, it is quite beyond my power to imagine.”

“ You are wrong, sir ; you are mistaken ! —indeed, indeed, you are !” cried poor Julia, inexpressibly shocked at the idea of her having a secret lover.

“ Then answer me one question, Julia ; and if you will, I will say no more, but only endeavour, if you will let me, to settle your remaining money in some way or other, that may prevent your being thus scandalously

robbed for the future. Only tell me, upon the honour of your father's child, that the person to whom you have lent this money is not one on whom you have bestowed the affections of your heart."

Julia closed her eyes that she might not meet the inquiring look that was fixed upon her face, her face burning, as she felt, with crimson blushes, and then she covered it with both her hands. But she did not speak. So conjured, she could not have uttered a falsehood had instant death been the consequence of her abstaining from it, and there she sat, poor little girl, convicted, clearly convicted, of having bestowed a large sum of money upon a lover, within a very few days of being in possession of it!

Colonel Dermont was as much grieved and shocked as it was well possible for a gentleman to be. But there was one feeling paramount above all others, and this, under the circumstances, was rather a whimsical one. It occurred to him, good conscientious man, that his first duty, after making this most painful discovery, must be

to take measures for preventing the lovely, high-born wife of his son from being disgraced and contaminated by any intimate association with a young female who had so shamefully misconducted herself. After reflecting upon this really difficult point for a minute or two, during which the sight of Julia's tears trickling through her fingers touched his heart, without softening the severity of his judgment, he said, "It has been settled amongst us, Julia Drummond, that our dear son and his charming wife should take up their residence at the Mount for as long a time as they shall find it agreeable to them. This being the case I will not conceal from you the fact that I should wish you, if you please, to accept that old lady's invitation—your mother's aunt, you know, who has written two or three times to Mrs. Dermont, as of course you remember, saying that when we could spare you she should like your company. Hitherto we have put it off, and put it off, because we did *not* quite like to lose your company; and Alfred, you know, was always against

your going. But now it seems to me, I own, that the case is different. I don't wish to be severe. I *won't* be severe, Julia Drummond; for the sake of those who are dead and gone. I *won't* be severe; but ask who you will, and I believe they will tell you that it is my duty to prevent your being over intimate with my daughter-in-law. For a young lady, Miss Drummond, to have a secret lover, whose name she will not mention, is bad enough, disgraceful enough, fully to justify what I am now saying to you. That a young lady of your age should draw out thirteen hundred pounds of her fortune, and that too, for a person whose name she declines to mention, is also enough to justify the father-in-law of such a person as Miss Thorwold, in taking measures to prevent any great intimacy between her and the mysterious young lady in question. But when these two things are joined together, I think I may leave it to yourself to decide, whether Mrs. Alfred Dermont and this young person, ought to be members of the same family."

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During the whole of this long speech Julia continued to conceal her face with her hands, but when it appeared to have reached its conclusion, she changed her attitude, wiped the tears from her eyes, and replied, in a very gentle but tolerably firm voice, that she would write to her aunt M'Kensie by that day's post.

In a general way Colonel Dermont was not in the habit of endeavouring to find out more than met the ear in what was said to him; but the tone of Julia puzzled him. There was something in it which made him think his proposal for turning her out of his house was rather agreeable to her than otherwise, and he remained looking at her in silence for a minute or two.

There was nothing in her countenance, however, though it still bore traces of tears, which at all tended to lessen this impression, and the idea that she positively liked to be sent off in disgrace from the Mount, and all its delights, in order to become the inmate of an old lady's house in the Highlands, struck him as being so perfectly unnatural as to re-

quire some very strong reasons to account for it. He was not in a state of mind to make the discovery of these reasons a matter of much difficulty. That Julia rejoiced at escaping from his watchful eye, in order to carry on her mysterious and disgraceful intercourse with her unknown lover, appeared to him a matter of such unquestionable certainty, that he would really have been ashamed of himself could he have doubted it for a moment. He rose from his chair, and gravely extending his hand, said, "This is to me a very painful moment, Julia Drummond. That it is otherwise to you ought to prevent the sorrow I feel from being lasting. Farewell! May you awaken to a consciousness of the danger of the course you are in, before it is too late to save yourself from utter destruction. Farewell."

Julia repeated the word, but not very steadily; neither, with all her efforts, could she prevent a fresh gush of tears from flowing down her cheeks as she raised her eyes to take a last look at her guardian.

Colonel Dermont was touched in despite

of what he believed to be his duty, and turning suddenly round after he had laid his hand upon the lock of the door, he said, "Julia! Tell me the villain's name, only tell me his name, and I will do any thing rather than part with you." But Julia shook her head, and firmly pronouncing the word "Impossible!" turned away and walked towards the window.

Before she had reached it the door was opened and closed again, and Julia Drummond was alone.

CHAPTER VIII.

COLONEL DERMONT's ride back to the Mount was a very melancholy one. He was essentially a very kind-hearted man, and really had loved the unfortunate Julia Drummond as well as it was possible for a human being, absorbed as he was by his affection for Alfred, to love any body else. He had been kind to her, uniformly kind to her, and their union had, up to this unhappy day, been one of affectionate and unbroken harmony. The change which had now taken place was too violent to be met without deep pain, and except, perhaps, at the moment when he hung over the death-bed of the offender's gallant grandfather, he had never felt so thoroughly

unhappy in his life. But the colonel was not only a kind-hearted, he was also a conscientious man, and he found his best consolation in believing that by guarding the beloved wife of his son from the contamination of Julia's society, he had been strictly doing his duty.

The first person he met on entering his house was Alfred. The happy, gay-hearted, triumphant Alfred, who had passed the interval of his absence tête-à-tête with Amelia in the library; that fair creature having indulged him in that way rather longer than usual, for the purpose of impressing upon his mind that the only reason which could rationally induce two gay young people, like themselves, to consent to the scheme of residing with the old people during a part of the year, was that they might spend the whole of the income allowed them in London during the other part.

But Amelia, having obtained his deeply-pledged assurance, that from the hour she became his wife, her will should rule him in all things, had dismissed him, having, as she

said, a great many little preparations about her wedding-dress to look after and superintend. This was, perhaps, the only excuse she could have found for getting away from him, which would have left him gay. But gay he now was, and gaily he stepped forward to meet his father.

"Good Heaven! my dear sir, what is the matter?" exclaimed Alfred, immediately struck by the melancholy aspect of the colonel. "You have heard some bad news I am certain. Is it any thing about Amelia? Any thing to postpone our wedding-day?"

"No, my dear boy, no!" replied the colonel; "nothing that you, I suppose, would think so bad as that. But, nevertheless, Alfred, I have learnt something which grieves me to the heart. Come to the library with me, and I will tell you all that I know about it; and it is just possible, I think, that your young wits being sharper than mine, and your eyes too, perhaps you may be able to give me a hint upon a subject that is to me a complete mystery." Knowing that his Amelia was in the act of pre-

paring her wedding-dress, and being determined not to interrupt such an almost sacred occupation, he followed his father without opposition, though greatly too much preoccupied to feel much interest in his mystery.

"Alfred!" said the colonel, as soon as they had both seated themselves, "I have found out one mystery, though I have fallen upon another. I have found out why Julia Drummond refused Mr. Borrowdale."

"Really, sir, I don't think there was any great mystery in that," replied Alfred. "She refused him because she did not like him."

"Good. But why did she not like him, Alfred?" returned the colonel. "How was it possible that any young girl could help liking him—unless, Alfred, unless she liked another better?"

What thought it was which flashed through the young man's brain as he listened to these words, it is not easy to say. It might be that he was disagreeably surprised to hear it stated that his dear friend Julia was suspected of having a secret attachment

to any man; or it might be that he feared he was going to be told that it was suspected she was attached to himself. Whatever might be the cause, he certainly changed colour, and answered, with some slight embarrassment, "I hope not, sir."

"It is past hoping; I am sorry to say that it is past hoping, Alfred. As far as being attached to another man, she has confessed it, Alfred."

"You must excuse me for saying, my dear sir, that I think it is equally useless and unkind to urge Julia upon such a subject as this," replied Alfred, with heightened colour, and a look of considerable displeasure on his brow. "We have no right of any kind to urge her to marry a man she does not like, and still less, if possible, to insist upon her declaring her reasons for refusing him."

"My dear Alfred, you mistake me altogether. I never urged her to do any such thing. This was merely an accidental inference, as you will perceive, if you will listen to me, for a moment, patiently."

Colonel Dermont then related the steps he

had taken in order to obtain for Julia a more profitable investment of her money than the English funds, and the success which had attended those efforts. He then went on to describe the interview he had just had with her, stating very fairly all that had been said on both sides.

The feelings with which Alfred listened to this narrative, were decidedly the most painful he had ever experienced. That the generous act of Julia, and the greatly more generous silence with which she had endured an accusation so foreign to her nature, so degrading, so indelicate, should bring upon her the disgraceful sentence of banishment which his father confessed he had pronounced; and that too, for the sake of saving Amelia, the deeply indebted Amelia, from the contamination of her presence, was more than he could bear, and feeling beyond the possibility of doubt that Amelia's feelings upon the subject must be the same as his own, and yielding to this persuasion, as well as to the natural impetuosity of his nature, he laid his hand

upon the arm of his father, and sternly exclaimed.

"Now, sir, hear me ! And never again, while you live, suffer appearances, however strong, to wipe from your mind the record of a life as faultless, and as pure as that of Julia."

He then related the whole affair exactly as it had passed, taking care to make Amelia's part of it appear what, indeed, he truly considered it to be, a shining proof of her generous, and confiding temper.

Never perhaps did any man look, or feel more ashamed of himself than did Colonel Dermont as he listened to this straightforward narrative.

"Reproach me, Alfred, reproach me as much as you will," he exclaimed, "it is impossible you can reproach me too much. That I should be such a fool, such an idiot, as to believe that such a dear innocent young creature could have picked up a vagabond of a lover, and sold her money out of the stocks for him ! No, I shall never forgive myself—never, never."

"Let us be thankful, father," said Alfred, "that no worse mischief has been yet done than the paining her dear, gentle heart for an hour or two. Would it tire you, sir, to ride over to the Grange again, to tell her that you have heard the whole story from me? I would willingly go myself, but she certainly does deserve an apology that none but yourself can offer?"

"God bless her! She does indeed, poor child, and she shall have it, Alfred, as fully as it is in my power to speak it. I shall be ashamed to look at her, but I do not mean to shrink from it, I promise you. There is the bell for luncheon. I will just take a glass of wine, and a crust of bread, while they put the saddle on again, and will be off directly. Poor, dear little soul! How the tears did run down between her fingers, to be sure! And she never uttered a single word of reproach, but gave me such a kind and loving look, just at the very last—just as she turned away from me! But God bless me, Alfred," he continued, stopping short in his progress towards the dining-room, to which they were approaching

arm in arm, "what could she mean when my heart softened towards her, and I came back from the door and said, 'Only tell me, upon the honour of your father's child.'—Now mind, Alfred, I am repeating the exact words,—'Only tell me, on the honour of your father's child, that the person to whom you have lent this money is not one on whom you have bestowed your affections;' those are the words I said, and how do you think she answered them? Would you not have thought that she might straightforward have answered, No? But not a bit of it. She did not say *yes*, to be sure, but she made me understand that she meant *yes*, as plainly every bit as if she had, for she covered up her blushing face with both her hands, and did not speak a single word. What could I take this for but a confession? But there, again, you see I was mistaken. But what in the world could she mean by it?"

"Depend upon it, sir, she meant nothing of the kind. The whole interview, as you have described it, must have been terribly painful to her, and the hiding her face was

very natural," said Alfred; feeling, perhaps, at that moment as if he should have very well liked to hide his own.

"I suppose so," said the old gentleman, with a penitent sigh, and, without saying any more about it, he continued his progress into the dining-room.

In justice to the modesty of Alfred it must be here observed that the emotion he betrayed at hearing words likely to suggest the idea that Julia loved him—rather more than was necessary for an adopted sister—did not arise from any vain ideas of his own. But on this subject his eyes had been very unpleasantly opened by the fair Amelia.

When, after the borrowing scene with her in Mrs. Verepoint's library, he had recounted the particulars of Julia's behaviour to the lady of his love, the recapitulation of her looks and words affected him so strongly that his eyes filled with tears. Had the beautiful Amelia loved Alfred Dermont, she might, perhaps, have felt jealous at this proof of tender sensibility; but, as it was, she was only piqued, and said, with a meaning laugh, "You are not quite aware, I suspect, of the

tender flame you have kindled in that quarter. Take my word for it, Alfred, this money would never have been lent had Julia not been in love with you."

If it had been possible for Alfred to have been angry with Miss Thorwold he would have been so then; and, perhaps, she perceived the contingent possibility, for she said, in a manner that she well knew was irresistible, "Ah, Alfred, you know the old proverb—'set a thief,' and so on. You must not look gravely at me. Had I not loved you so very well myself, I might not have fancied symptoms of the same weakness in another."

Need it be said that Amelia was forgiven?

While these various scenes were going on, with more or less of gravity and even of suffering, among the gentlemen and ladies of our tale, the individuals in the humbler offices were as busy as so many bees, working very hard, it is true, but amidst shouts of light and lively laughter, and with spirits luxuriating in the sort of bustle, and with the sort of anticipation that they loved the best.

The arrival amongst them of Susan was

the signal for fresh jocularities, for her delight in her new appointment was so great as to render every look a smile, and every labour an amusement, and gaily indeed did her tongue run when, after receiving her instructions from Mrs. Dermont, she entered upon her task of sewing fringe upon window curtains amidst the other elegant labours going on in the housekeeper's room.

"But I think it is very hard though," said Susan, "that of all the servants in the house, kitchen-maid, and stable-boy into the bargain, I am the only one who has never seen the beautiful bride."

"Then why did your young lady take herself off so?" replied another of the party, raising her eyes from the wreath of paste she was preparing for the sides of a game patée.

"Nay, Susan, for that matter," resumed a third, "you might see her easy enough this very minute if you will, for I seed her not a minute ago coming along the passage up stairs to her own room. As she never set eyes upon you before, she won't know but what you may be one of the housemaids,

come to see if her water jugs is filled up. You have got nothing to do but just to take yonder green can in your hand and walk in, and have a good stare at her. Her room is the pink room, you know."

Susan yielded to the temptation, casting a deprecating look at the housekeeper, she carefully arranged her work upon her chair, seized upon the water can, and straightway mounted the stairs. In less time than could have been expected her returning steps were heard, and more than one tongue was preparing to inquire what she thought of the beauty, when she re-entered the room, with tottering steps, and a face as pale as ashes.

"Mercy on me, Susan ! what is the matter with you ? Why you look as if you had seen a ghost instead of a bride," said one of the women, staring at her.

"You don't mean to tell me," said Susan, seating herself, as it seemed, because she was unable to stand, "you don't mean to tell me that the person, the lady, that is at this moment up in the pink room is going to be married to our Mr. Alfred?"

“ Don't I though ?” returned the worker in paste. “ Isn't she beautiful enough for your taste, Miss Jenkins ? At any rate, if you have taken any objection, I would advise you as a friend, not to let Mr. Alfred know it, for I can tell you that it is likely enough he would put you in the first frying pan he could catch, and never spare grease till you were done to his liking.”

Susan evidently neither listened to, nor heard, a single word of this tirade, but after sitting perfectly still for a minute or two she rose up, walked to the corner where spring water was conveyed into the room, and having seized upon a basin which stood on the table under it, drew sufficient for a copious draught, and swallowed it.

“ I will speak to her if I die for it,” said she, turning towards the door ; “ it is possible I may be mistaken, but I will soon know ;” and though more than one voice was raised to stop her, she heeded them not, but mounted with a resolute step the flight of back stairs which led to the best bed-rooms. It is scarcely necessary to tell the intelligent reader that

Susan Jenkins was the same Susan who had waited upon Miss Thorwold at Mrs. Stedworth's lodgings in Half-Moon-street; neither can it be necessary to add, that the being assured that the heir of the Mount was about to unite himself in holy matrimony to that beautiful young lady, caused her to feel rather faint and uncomfortable.

Susan Jenkins, as we have said, walked up the back stairs with a resolute step, but it was also a slow one. The girl was a good girl, and she was moreover a grateful and attached dependant upon the Dermont family; for which reasons, though she was both young and ignorant, she had decidedly made up her mind to prevent, by some means or other, espousals which appeared to her so very particularly objectionable. But how to manage it she did not exactly know. In the first place, however, she very properly determined to give the young lady the benefit of such doubts respecting her identity, as fairly arose from the shortness of the glance which she had given her, a glance too, which had not been reciprocal, for the young lady

had been engaged in the examination of a beautiful wreath of orange blossoms when she entered the room with her can, and, not having raised her eyes, had certainly left one very important feature unscrutinised by her humble acquaintance.

It was quite right, therefore, that Susan should make herself still more certain of the identity than she felt already, before she took any steps towards making other people as well acquainted with the young lady as she was herself. This, however, was but a trifling part of the business which she had in hand. She was quite aware that she might have difficulties to encounter in proving the assertions she was determined to make ; Miss Thorwold might deny the identity ; she might declare that she had never beheld Susan before, and that her strange and most improbable statements must have arisen from mistake.

“ In that case,” thought Susan, “ I must make the colonel go up to London himself to see that wicked woman, Mrs. Stedworth, and get the truth out of her ;” but her next

thought made the last one pretty nearly valueless, for did not Susan know that the getting truth from Mrs. Stedworth would, in all moral probability, prove impossible? Her purpose, however, was not to be abandoned because it was difficult, and muttering as she went, that a faint heart never could get rid of a fair lady any more than it could win her, she boldly stepped forward, opened the door, and stood in the presence of the beauty.

As she entered the room this time with less of civil, housemaid-quietness than before, Miss Thorwold raised her eyes to challenge the business of the intruder, and then, if any doubts did rest on the mind of Susan respecting her being the same beautiful young lady whose fine long hair she had brushed in Half-Moon-street, they were now removed. It was impossible to have seen Amelia Thorwold and her fine hair so recently, and not to remember her.

The glance which the beauty now encountered from the honest eye of Susan, was neither transitory nor timid. On the contrary, it was steady, fixed, and very intel-

ligent. If it were possible to take the liberty of pitying so very beautiful and every way distinguished a young lady as Miss Thorwold, she might have been pitied then. Susan did not recognise her with at all more certainty than she recognised Susan, and the effect upon her mind was not much unlike that which quick and violent poison might have produced upon her body. Her nerves seemed to wither as she looked at her.

It was with great and extraordinary rapidity that, after the first gasp was over, a variety of schemes shot through the unfortunate Amelia's brain, all of them having for their object the rendering the evidence of this unexpected witness against her, of non-effect. She remembered, with a sort of convulsive joy, how well she had warded off the equally pressing danger with which the lawyer's letter had threatened her, and remembering also with desperate vividness, that she must be true to herself now or fall for ever, she drew a long breath which seemed to string her nerves anew, and re-

turning the earnest gaze of Susan, she said, with great solemnity, and in a style to make the humble aspirant to the honour of exposing truth to the light of day, pretty clearly understand what she would have to encounter if she persevered in the attempt.

“Is it possible, young woman, that after the disgraceful, but perfectly just manner in which I saw you dismissed from the service of Mrs. Stedworth, you can dare to have introduced yourself as a servant in such a family as this? Believe me, you are very ill advised. You must be aware that it is quite impossible any statements of yours can be listened to in contradiction to what I must feel it my duty to say respecting you. Do not flatter yourself, young woman, that any lies and improbable histories which you may attempt to tell, will save you from the most ignominious expulsion from the house. Far from saving you, indeed, such statements will most likely lodge you in a gaol. But I pity you, Susan, I pity your youth, and I pity you for the dreadful scrape that you seem likely to fall into, and I am willing,

from remembering the civility with which you waited upon me in London, to stretch forth a friendly hand to help you. Take my advice, Susan. Leave your place instantly upon any excuse you like. Here are ten sovereigns (a part of Lord Ripley's wedding present). Let these convey you to London. When they are gone you may apply to me for more. I pity you, Susan, and shall always be ready to help you, provided, of course, that you conduct yourself properly, and never suffer your lips to utter what it will be for ever impossible for you to prove."

Susan Jenkins stood listening to her in perfect stillness till she had finished, and then, without saying a single word in reply, or appearing at all conscious that money had been offered to her, she turned round and walked out of the room.

The sensations of Miss Thorwold were not agreeable. It was not difficult to interpret the silence of Susan. Had the money been only promised, and not offered, it might, perhaps, have been inferred that the

silence which was to ensure reward was thus promised, as it were, by a symbol. But the utter contempt of a bribe, which seemed to be inferred by the manner in which the offer of the money had been received, told a different tale, and Amelia perceived at once that the only chance left her, lay in the hope that her statement as to the nature of their former acquaintance might be received in preference to that of Susan.

It was at this moment that the bell rang for luncheon, and the start which Amelia gave on hearing it, proved that the courage she was struggling to call to her assistance, was not yet come. "They will not be greatly surprised at my absence, for I never obey the bell immediately. And they will not send to me directly, for they have left it off since they were desired not to mind my being late. A few minutes, very few minutes, will suffice to prepare me for it all."

It was thus that the unhappy beauty communed with herself as she bathed her temples, her forehead, almost her whole head in eau de Cologne. And by degrees,

she felt her courage return; the act of feigning was too familiar to her, for the necessity of resorting to it to affect her very painfully. She knew that her powers in that line were very considerable, and trusting to them, and to the sharp spur of necessity which, she knew by experience, always acted upon her like inspiration, she arranged her hair and her looks in the glass, and resolutely descended to the dining-room.

Meanwhile the colonel, faithful to his purpose of going back to Julia with all possible speed, had already taken his wine and crust of bread, and had just mounted into his saddle as Miss Thorwold walked across the hall.

And which must we follow first? For the adventures of both must be recounted. Let the preference be given to age. Colonel Dermont had for some years past preferred a gentle amble to any other pace; and his favourite horse, perhaps in compliment to his master, had very cordially adopted the same preference; but both horse and man were upon the present occasion constrained

by what seemed to both a very urgent necessity, to change their ordinary movement for a pretty active trot, which brought them in a short time to Mrs. Verepoint's door.

The three ladies had just concluded their noonday meal, and Charlotte perceiving from her friend Julia's countenance that the Colonel's tête-à-tête visit had not been a pleasant one, invited her to take a stroll among the dark old oaks at the back of the house, instead of letting her go up stairs to exhibit her swollen eyes in the bright light drawing-room.

The old lady meanwhile was enjoying her autumn fire in that abode of all comfort, and there it was that the Colonel was desired to enter, while the steps of Miss Drummond, for whom he had inquired, were traced by a light-heeled footman who speedily ushered her, greatly astonished at the summons, into his presence. Colonel Dermont, however, was too much in earnest to bestow any time upon ceremony, and quite unmindful, or indifferent, to the effect which his asking twice

within three hours for a tête-à-tête with his *ci-devant* ward must produce, he said within less than a minute after the two young ladies entered the room,

“Julia, my dear, will you let me speak to you for five minutes alone?”

The kind accent in which this was uttered, as well as the words themselves, seemed to drop balm upon the aching heart of Julia, and though perfectly unable to guess what could possibly have happened to clear her, she felt at once that she *was* cleared, and with an eye and an aspect radiant with recovered gladness, she accepted the arm that was gallantly offered to her, and accompanied the penitent, but well-pleased old gentleman down stairs.

Having reached the fine old room which had twice before been the scene of such important interviews to her, Julia almost trembled as she closed the door; but ere she had time to ask herself again, “What *can* it be?” her friendly guardian seized her by both her hands, and having first impressed a paternal kiss on her fair forehead, he said, “I know

you would not like to see an old man kneel to you, my dear child, but upon my honour, Julia, I can hardly help it. You are an angel, my dear, you are, indeed, and it is not very long since, in this very room, I behaved to you like a brute. Can you forgive me, Julia Drummond?"

"Indeed, and indeed, dearest Colonel, I was never for a single moment angry with you," she replied. "What could you think, but just what you did think? But how is it, who is it, that has set you right? What vexed me most of all was, that it did not seem possible you ever *should* know the truth. Who is it that has told?"

"Who, Julia? Who should it be but our own generous Alfred? You sent me home miserable enough this morning, I can tell you, and the very moment I caught sight of Alfred, I told him of my sad disappointment, Julia, in all ways. But that dear boy was born to be the joy of my life, as he has proved to me over and over again. And now, the very moment he found out the cause of my trouble, he cured it—cured it

by a single word, Julia. He said the money was lent to him, and I need not tell you that all my miserable thoughts and suspicions were cured at once. You must have known *that*, my poor dear child, well enough, and I honour you, Julia, for having kept your promise so faithfully."

That Julia's heart was lightened of a grievously heavy load is most certain, and she thanked Heaven for the blessing, which was assuredly not the less precious because it came from the generous self-devotion of Alfred. Nevertheless, she did not, and could not, feel perfectly satisfied by the communication of the colonel. Had he indeed listened to Alfred's avowal that the money was lent to him, without making any inquiry as to his reason for borrowing it? If so, it was a greater degree of forbearance than Alfred himself had expected, or he would not so vehemently have objected to the fact of the borrowing being made known to him. And if he had asked, what had the answer been? Had Miss Thorwold any thing to do with it? Or had she not? To make any

such inquiry, however, was perfectly out of the question, and Julia had received a hearty farewell benediction from her recovered friend, when the door of Mrs. Verepoint's library was suddenly thrown open, and Susan Jenkins, vehemently struggling against the efforts of the servant who would have prevented her entrance, rushed into the room.

CHAPTER IX.

THE countenance of the girl was violently flushed, and she trembled so greatly from having over-exerted herself by the speed she had used in walking from the Mount, which distance she had traversed in an incredibly short space of time, that she caught hold of a chair to support herself, as she came into the room, and then, almost unconsciously as it seemed, sunk into it, and burst into tears. Both the colonel and Julia exclaimed at the same moment, "What is the matter, Susan?—Who is hurt?—Who is ill?—What is the matter?"

The girl, though evidently much exhausted, and rapidly becoming as pale as

she had before been the contrary, had sufficient strength and presence of mind left to reply, "Nobody is hurt—nobody is ill."

"Then she has been ill-treated, or hurt, in some manner herself, Julia," said Colonel Dermont; and taking her hand in his, to feel her pulse, exclaimed, "I believe the poor girl is going to faint: she ought to have a glass of wine, or some drops, or something."

Julia, greatly alarmed for her favourite, ran up stairs with all speed to Mrs. Verepoint, and gave such an account of the poor girl's condition, and of the difficulty of finding out what was the matter with her, that Mrs. Verepoint, both alarmed and curious, hurried into the library with Julia, while Charlotte was despatched to find a glass of wine, without suffering any servant to come into the room with her. A bottle of strong salts in the hands of the old lady had already proved very efficacious, and the glass of wine brought by her daughter still more so, and so rapidly did her complexion appear to be recovering its

usual tint, that the colonel seemed to think the best thing he could do would be to take his leave, and trust the nervous young waiting-maid to the care of the kind ladies who surrounded her. But no sooner had he expressed this intention, than Susan Jenkins gave symptoms of being worse than ever, for she clasped her hands one minute, and used them with such a vehement effort to detain him the next, that they all began to fear that the misfortune which had befallen her, be it what it might, had disturbed her reason. Perhaps she perceived this suspicion in the looks which were exchanged between them, for, making a strong effort to recover her usual manner, she got up and said,

“ Pray, sir, let me beg of you as the very greatest favour, that you will not go. I have got something, that concerns you nearly, to tell. I did not know that I should have the good fortune of finding you here, and it was to Miss Julia that I meant to tell it all; but it is far better, and more

proper in every way, that it should be you, sir."

"If it is something which concerns the colonel, young woman," said Mrs. Verépoint, gently, "I and my daughter had better go away; and I dare say Colonel Dermont and Miss Drummond will give you leave to sit down again, for you do not look yet as if you were quite able to stand."

"No, madam, no," replied Susan, "I have nothing to say but what ought to be known: all the danger is that it should not be known enough;—and yet I would rather, too, that both these young ladies were away: my horrid story is noways fit for their ears."

The two girls needed no second hint, but instantly left the room. Susan had reseated herself, and, considering the nature and the importance of what she had to communicate, her efforts to compose herself, in order that her strange tale might be intelligible, did great credit to her good sense. Yet, with all this, it seemed doubtful for a minute or two whether she would be able

to execute her purpose. Colonel Dermont evidently suspected that the promised disclosure would prove to be the history of some rustic adventure of gallantry, the disgrace of which the agitated young woman was anxious to remove from herself; but Mrs. Verepoint, to whom he had communicated his suspicion, did not agree with him. There was an air of great innocence and modesty in the countenance of Susan Jenkins, and though prepared, by her desiring the absence of the young ladies, to hear some history unfit for their ears, she felt a strong persuasion that the poor girl was not the heroine of it.

“Now then, young woman,” said Mrs. Verepoint, kindly, “tell us at once what it is which has affected you so strongly.”

Susan paused still another moment to decide, as it seemed, where she should begin, and then she said, “My last service in London was in the house of Mrs. Stedworth, in Half-Moon-street, Piccadilly. I never quite liked it, because there was something that I could not make out in the manner in which

William. I never heard any other name. My mistress and the young lady, whose name I never heard at all from first to last (for my mistress always called her 'drawing-room,' or the drawing-room lady when she spoke of her); but my mistress and this young lady never scrupled to talk before me when I was brushing her hair, or helping her dress, about her being going to be married to Lord William, and at last the day came. My mistress made no secret to me about it. She said that she was going to church with them, and a hackney-coach came to the door in the morning, which took Lord William, the young lady, and my mistress away. In about an hour, as well as I can remember, they came back, and in the meantime I had, according to my orders, prepared breakfast for them in the drawing-room, and after they had breakfasted, I was sent out to call another coach for the bride and bridegroom, which I heard ordered to some railroad station, I forget which. At the end of a fortnight they came back again. and then Lord William lodged in the house too, as the hus-

band of the lady. And for a few days they seemed just as new married people might be, the gentleman very polite and fond of the lady, and she always smiling, and looking as beautiful, and as nicely dressed as if she was going to receive all the company in the world. During this time my mistress always called the new married lady, Lady William. But it was but a very little while before I began to see a change in more ways than one. Lady William, as they called her, seemed to grow cross, and out of spirits, while my mistress grew gayer, and smarter-looking every day. She was not over young, but she could manage when she liked it, to look very handsome too, and she used to dress as nice as the lady herself, and always in time to go to the door herself when Lord William came home to dinner. And then he changed his way of knocking, and came to the door with a single tap, but still my mistress seemed to know that it was him, for she always went to the door herself, and from the time he took to knocking in this way, he always turned into

the front parlour before he went up stairs, and would sit there with my mistress for near upon an hour together. At last the lord and the lady seemed to have a quarrel, for I heard very high words between them one evening, and my lord came down stairs and went into the parlour, and sat there longer, I should think, than an hour, and then he went out. My mistress then came into the kitchen to me, and told me to take up tea to my lady, and ask her if she wanted anything. Which I did, and she told me she was going to bed, which she did almost directly. And then my mistress came to me and told me that I must go to bed too, for that his lordship was not coming home, and that she wanted the house quiet, because she was not well herself, and meant to go to bed early. My bed was in a very little room on the parlour floor, just at the top of the kitchen stairs. I went into my room, but I did not go to bed, because I had a bit of sewing to do for myself, but I sat as quiet as possible, because I would not disturb anybody. About

her determined not to shrink from any thing that was necessary to make her narrative understood.

“On the following morning,” she continued, “Lord William went out before breakfast, but employed himself in the parlour for some time before he did so, in writing, as I presume, a letter to the lady, for he gave me a letter for her, as he went out. My mistress was with her when I delivered it, and something that I said in answer to a question which the lady asked, gave Mrs. Stedworth reason to suppose that I was acquainted with what had happened the night before; and she followed me out of the room, calling me every sort of bad name, and she called up the charwoman to bear witness that I was turned out of her house at a minute’s warning, as a thief, and a liar, and worse. Of course I did not try to defend myself, but got away as soon as possible.”

Here Susan paused, and, fixing her eyes upon the ground, remained for a moment silent. She then stood up, and seemed in-

tending to say something more, but her colour varied, and again she seemed too much agitated to speak.

The colonel very evidently thought that the long story they had been listening to, belonged to the class of narratives usually called "cock and bull." He shrugged his shoulders, and said, "Well, my girl, I suppose I may go now?"

Even Mrs. Verepoint, notwithstanding the decided predilection she had felt in her favour, thought that they had been detained for very little purpose, and rather coldly saying, "I dare say, young woman, you are very glad to have exchanged so disreputable a place, for one so very different, but there is no use in talking about it now." She rose up for the purpose of attending the colonel out of the room.

The critical moment was come. Greatly as Susan Jenkins dreaded the effect which her next words must produce on the colonel, she knew that she must speak them now, or never. But she could not look him in the face as she did it; forgetting for the moment

that her words were to save him from disgrace, she felt as if she were about to overwhelm the honoured patron of her race with shame, and while she suddenly stretched out her hand to stop their exit, she fixed her eyes upon the face of Mrs. Verepoint as she exclaimed, in a deep, hollow, but perfectly audible whisper, "That lady, and Mr. Alfred's intended wife, are the same person."

CHAPTER X.

THE effect produced by these words was far from being the same on Colonel Dermont and Mrs. Verepoint. The lady, though greatly shocked, and greatly surprised also, believed every word which the girl had spoken. The colonel, on the contrary, believed nothing, but that poor Susan had got into a house of the very worst description, and had either audaciously invented this improbable story of the beautiful Amelia, or else, that she had mistaken his charming daughter-in-law that was to be, for one of the unhappy beauties likely enough to be seen in such an establishment. That thus believing, he should be violently angry with poor Susan, was but

natural, and certainly he did not spare invectives against her "abominable falsehoods," as he scrupled not to call every word she had said.

"Leave the room, and leave the house instantly," he said. "I beg your pardon, Mrs. Verepoint, but I must take the liberty of insisting upon it that she should leave the house instantly. Not for much would I have the mind of my young ward exposed to the corruption which this creature must carry with her wherever she goes. Begone!" he reiterated, with more vehemence, perhaps, than he was ever heard to speak with before. "I will not quit the premises till I know she is out of the way of poor dear Julia—whose heart, I do believe, she would break outright, if she were to repeat this horrid invention to her."

Susan looked terrified, and profoundly miserable ; but still she kept standing before him.

"Oh ! sir, don't send me away," she cried, "don't send me away till you are quite, quite

sure! Don't let the marriage be, till you are quite, quite sure!"

"Do you hear her?—do you hear her persevering insolence, my good lady? I certainly do not choose to lay hands on her myself, but I really must beg, Mrs. Verepoint, that you will permit some of your people to place her outside your gates, if she refuses to place herself there." And, assuming that the leave he asked was granted, the colonel rose, and walked towards the bell.

"No, sir, no!" said poor Susan, hastily preparing to leave the room. "I have tried to do my duty by the young gentleman, and by you too. But, of course, gentlefolks must act as they think right themselves. Perhaps they know better what is right than we do." And then, stopping but for half a moment to make an humble courtesy to Mrs. Verepoint, the ill-used Susan wrapped her shawl about her, and disappeared.

For a short space the old gentleman and lady sat looking at each other in silence; and then the colonel said: "Do you think,

madam, that since the beginning of the world, there ever was so audacious an instance of falsehood heard?"

"My dear colonel," replied the lady of the manor, "I should indeed be sorry, upon the evidence of any one, and much more on that of a young woman of whom we know so little, to receive as true, a statement which, besides being highly improbable, makes so horrible an attack upon one concerning whom you must feel so deeply interested. Nevertheless, you must forgive me if I say that, were I in your situation, I would not take the improbability of the story as a perfect refutation of it. I am willing enough to hope that it is, as you suppose, an infamous invention; but this should by no means prevent my inquiring a good deal more about it."

"You may depend upon it, my dear lady, I will inquire enough; and that I may set about doing so without loss of time, I will now take my leave of you. Give my love to dear little Julia, and tell her I shall set the matter of the mortgage right directly.

worth inquiring into? Just think it over, will you? Here's a high-born young lady, niece to a peer of the realm, and united in holy wedlock to a young nobleman, who, after running away to London, to be married to him, runs back again into the country as fast as she can trot, in order to be married to my son Alfred! I should think it would turn out one of the most remarkable cases of bigamy upon record. But the judge will hardly hang her—do you think he will? She is too handsome for that. However, I will go and see about it directly." And gaily kissing his hand, he left the room.

On reaching the Mount, he found the family in considerable confusion. Mrs. Dermont herself, notwithstanding the elegant regularity of her habits, had left her luxurious *bergère*, in which she took her usual morning allowance of knitting, for the purpose of superintending in person, at a very interesting board of inquiry which had been instituted in the parlour of the housekeeper.

"My mistress desired, colonel, that when you came in, you would be pleased to come

plaguing them to come here, so I left them to comfort one another in the library. Poor dear Amelia! She has had the worst fright of all!"

"What *is* the matter?" said the good colonel, rather impatiently. "I do wish you would tell me."

"And so I will, colonel. It is what I am going to do," replied Mrs. Dermont. "We have found out since you went away, after luncheon, that we have been harbouring a most horrid and depraved creature in the house, a thorough-paced thief, who has been in gaol again and again, and one of the most abandoned creatures, in every way, that ever found entrance into a decent family. One of the first things to be thought of was the plate, of course, and I was really so anxious about it, that I could not be easy till I came here myself, to see Robinson and Smith go over it with the catalogue."

"And who was the girl?" returned the colonel, looking very intelligent. "If I am not greatly mistaken, I could name her."

"You don't say so, my dear colonel!" ex-

claimed Mrs. Dermont, with energy. "Then I am sure you have heard something more than we know about her, for I am sure, for any thing I ever saw or heard of the girl, she is one of the very last in the world I should have suspected. It is no other than Susan Jenkins, colonel, Julia Drummond's new maid!"

"To be sure it is, my dear," replied the colonel, "and upon my honour and life, I shall think we are very lucky if we escape with only the loss of as much plate as she could carry, for I have seen her show off this morning in a style that would prevent my feeling at all surprised, if I saw her busily employed in setting fire to the house. But I want to hear your story first, and then you shall have mine. How was she found out there?"

"Why in the most shocking and abrupt way possible for our poor dear Miss Thorwold. She was sitting in her own room before luncheon, looking over some of her wedding clothes, I believe, pretty creature, when she heard the door open, and looking

round, she saw what frightened her almost out of her senses. It seems, you see, that when she went to London, like an angel as she is, to attend upon her dying friend, she mentioned her being there to nobody—indeed, she says, that the town was so empty, that it would have been difficult to find any body; and, therefore, when she came back from Nice, after the poor young lady's death, she was obliged, just at the time she wrote to us, you know, to go into a lodging for a few days. She knew the woman who kept the lodgings perfectly well, and she says that she is one of the best creatures in existence; but the poor good woman had been unlucky enough to take this vile girl, Susan Jenkins, into the house, and it was but a day or two before Miss Thorwold left it, that she was found out to be what she is. Amelia did not like," continued Mrs. Dermont, lowering her voice, "to tell me all the particulars, because Alfred was in the room; but she was found out to be worse than any thing poor Amelia had ever heard of; stories of all kinds came out against her, and a policeman

which the girl turned round and hurried out of the room, without saying another word, and the dear girl came down to us, looking frightened out of her senses, and told us what I have now told you. Alfred rang the bell and inquired if Susan Jenkins were still in the house, to which Thomas replied, no; that they had seen her go out in a great hurry, putting on her bonnet and shawl as she went, and without saying a single word to any body. That is my story, colonel, and now you must tell yours."

"The plate seems all right, colonel," said the steady butler, who, notwithstanding he had been listening pretty attentively to all his mistress had been saying, had pursued his official occupation without intermission.

"So much the better, Robinson," replied the colonel, "she seems to have started off in too great a hurry to have been able to take much; and now, my dear, if you will come into the drawing-room with me, you shall hear what I have got to tell of this clever young gaol bird. It is no subject for laughter though. I am truly sorry for her poor

father and mother—it is enough to break their hearts.”

In the drawing-room they found the lovers, and, to judge by the countenance of Alfred, their happiness had not been in any degree affected by the disagreeable adventure of the morning. Amelia, as usual, was seated on the sofa, and, as usual, Alfred occupied the foot-stool at her feet. The beautiful features of Amelia, too, looked radiant with tenderness and love. The moment the colonel entered, however, was a moment of trial for her. The mother and the son had listened to her statements with a fulness and perfection of belief, which had exceeded her hopes, and entirely banished her fears ; but would the more worldly colonel do the same? The question was a tremendous one for her, and with a sort of hurry and agitation, which it was beyond her power to master, she rose up the moment she saw him, and stood as if waiting to receive her doom. For, from the moment that Susan had turned away from her and her bribe, she had felt as certain that she was relating all she knew concerning her Half-

Moon-street adventures, as she could have been had she enjoyed the advantage of being concealed behind one of the damask curtains in Mrs. Verepoint's library, during the scene that has been described in the last chapter.

Had time been left her to recollect the strangeness of her thus suddenly rising, and of her standing in such an unusual way, awaiting the approach of her polite future father-in-law, she would have been conscious of having so far yielded to her terrors as to have been guilty of a great blunder, but ere any such disagreeable thought could arise, the arms of the old gentleman were thrown round her, and she felt herself most affectionately pressed to his bosom.

Now, then, all that was wanting to the perfect restoration of her tranquillity was to be assured that the very thing which, a few hours before, she had most dreaded, had actually taken place. She only wanted to know that Susan had poured her tale into the ears of Colonel Dermont, in order to feel, like to Napoleon in days of yore, that a favouring star presided over her destiny,

which for ever kept her safe from danger, let it threaten her as it would.

Nor was this crowning satisfaction long wanting; no sooner had the colonel fulfilled his intention of impressing a paternal kiss upon her forehead, than he gallantly led her back to the sofa, and, seating himself beside her, began to relate with a good deal of spirit and humour the outrageously improbable tale of the reprobate Susan.

"I have no doubt, my dear," said he, in conclusion, and addressing himself to his exceedingly amused future daughter-in-law; "I have no doubt at all, that if a sufficient portion of time were allowed her to arrange the facts of her narratives with a little more attention to probability, Miss Susan Jenkins might become one of the first romancers of the age. But being somewhat in a hurry this morning, she rather crowded events upon us. I suspect that before she came to the end of her story, she forgot that she had declared you were married at the beginning of it; and, to be sure, it was altogether the greatest hodge-podge of absurdities that ever

was listened to out of a mad-house. Nevertheless, I don't see what we can do to the creature, and that rather vexes me. She ought to be flogged, and sent to prison, there is no doubt about that. But we cannot punish her in this, or in any other way, you know, without having legal authority for it, and we are too pleasantly engaged just at present to have time for making depositions, and consulting lawyers. Don't you think so, my dear ?"

" Upon my word, dear colonel, if you ask my opinion about it, I shall answer you more in the spirit of the gospel than the law; for I think the spectacle of a young creature so utterly depraved, is so pitiable, that it is quite unnecessary that the hand of human justice should visit her, in order that she should suffer, even in this life, sufficient punishment for all her offences."

This beautiful sentiment, falling as it did from lips that seemed to move in harmony with its gentleness, produced very great effect upon the trio that listened to it.

" Angel !" exclaimed Alfred, lifting his

eyes to heaven, as if to salute the region from which she had recently descended.

"Dear child!" cried Mrs. Dermont, looking ready to weep from tender admiration, "that is what I call true Christian charity!"

"And so it is, Mrs. Dermont," said the colonel, taking Amelia's hand, and kissing it, "and I feel as if I ought to be ashamed of myself for wishing to take vengeance upon a poor unhappy wretch who is so very certain of being miserable, without any help of mine! God bless you, my dear! You are an example to us all."

It was, however, an example too sublime for the hot-headed Alfred to follow, and he told his father privately, that he should not be at ease as long as this abandoned girl continued in the neighbourhood.

"Not that I would actually bring her to condign punishment if I had the power of doing so," said he, "for I have a great regard for her father, but I cannot endure the idea of her repeating such lies as you have heard her tell to-day, among the servants and low people of the neighbourhood. And I shall

walk over to pay poor Jenkins a visit, and furnish him with the means of sending her back to London again to her aunt. Such a creature is enough to corrupt all the innocent girls in the parish."

"Well, Alfred, I dare say you are right," replied his father, with his accustomed deference to all the young gentleman's opinions, "I would wish you to do exactly as you like about it. Only take care, my dear, to be at home in good time for dinner."

The young man promised to comply with this very reasonable request, and telling his beloved that he was going to tear himself from her, for half an hour, in order to call upon one of the villagers whom he wished to see on business, he set off.

Having reached the cottage, he knocked at the door, which was opened to him by a girl of twelve years old, who was employed in ironing.

"Where is your father, Nancy?" said the young man.

"I don't rightly know, sir," replied the young laundress; "but if your honour will be

pleased to walk into the best kitchen, and wait a bit, I'll go and look for him."

She opened a door as she spoke, and the young man entered the neat apartment, which had often, in their younger days, been converted into a play-room for the pleasure of himself and Julia. The young girl drew the door after her, but did not shut it, so that although he was perfectly concealed from the sight of any one who was in the outer room, he heard every word that was spoken there as plainly as if he had been in it himself. This fact was speedily made manifest to him by the entrance of Julia Drummond and the unfortunate Susan.

As the words, "*My dearest Susan,*" uttered in the most affectionate accents, were the first sounds he heard, he was on the point of rushing out from his covert, in order to rescue his friend Julia from the contamination of holding intercourse with a wretch with whose crimes it was evident she was not yet acquainted.

But they spoke again, and his desire to overhear their conversation became greater

than his inclination to stop it. "Sit down, my dear Miss Julia!" said Susan, anxiously. "Indeed you look as pale as death, and altogether unfit to stand, without thinking about walking."

"But I must walk, Susan, able or not able, I must walk. Dear, kind Mrs. Verepoint thinks I am lying upon the bed all this time, but what is the good of lying upon the bed, when I cannot rest? Susan! Susan! if you love me you must do something to put off this horrible marriage; the very idea of it breaks my heart!"

"But my dear young lady, what can I do more than I have done?" replied Susan. "Have I not done my very best—have I not said every shocking thing that I could think of to the colonel himself? And did he mind what I said about her a bit more than if it had been so much praise? And I would say it again and again to please you, Miss Julia, if I did not know for certain sure that there was no good to be got by it, and it is such a horrid story to tell, Miss Julia, that I would a deal rather not say it over again to any

body. Every body as hears me telling it must, I know, think me the most bold and impudent girl that ever lived, and when it is so very plain that no good is to be got by telling it, I can't but say, Miss Julia, that I should be very, *very* thankful never to have it to say again."

" Oh, Susan !" replied Julia, in a voice which trembled with earnestness, " if you did but know the misery you make me feel by saying so, I am quite sure you never would say it again."

" I am sure too, Miss Julia," replied Susan, " that I love you too well to deny you any thing, but in the way of stopping Mr. Alfred's marriage, a deal more might be hoped for by your repeating it all yourself, my dear young lady, they would listen to you so much more patiently than they would to me ; they couldn't stop you short by saying to you ' be-gone ! ' as they did to me. Why will you not tell it all over again yourself, Miss Julia."

" Why don't I do it ? " cried Julia, in an accent of angry remonstrance, " what nonsense it is to talk so ! what good could my

telling it do ? Could I say that I was in the same house with them in London, and that I saw it all ? Would they not know that I was telling them things of which I knew nothing ?”

“ But you could say that you had it from me, and then it would be the same as if I said it myself, only it would be ten times better,” said Susan, beseechingly. “ Besides, Miss Julia, you seem quite entirely to forget that they have all said I should never enter their doors again ; I cannot go in by force, you know, and it is no good for me to promise what I am sure I should never be able to do. It must be yourself, Miss Julia, indeed, indeed it must, if any body attempts to try it again ; I never can, no, I never can forget the colonel's look and voice, when he cried out ‘ begone ! ’ ”

“ And for fear of hearing that, Susan, you will let me see this hateful marriage take place before my eyes, though you know it is a sight that will break my heart ; but Susan,” continued Julia, in accents of the most earnest entreaty, “ but Susan, there is no need that

you ever should hear the colonel say 'begone' any more ; I will never ask you to attempt saying a word to him again ; let us forget that we ever talked about it. All I will ask you to do now is to see Mr. Alfred himself, say to him solemnly, Susan, that you conjure him, as he values his own honour, and the honour of his family, to listen to you ; he will not refuse you, Susan ; he is too kind, too good for that, and when you see him ready to listen, tell him exactly word for word the same history that you told the colonel, in the presence of Mrs. Verepoint. It is impossible, oh ! it is impossible, that when he hears that, he should persevere in his intention of marrying Miss Thorwold."

" Well !" replied Susan, with a sigh, " I will try to do as you will have me, my dear young lady, though I think if you was to say it all yourself, it would go a deal further towards obtaining what you want."

" Never mind about that, Susan, you have given me your promise, and I am contented ; it is the only chance there is left, for I have told you already that *my* speaking to Mr.

Alfred on the subject is altogether impossible. And now I must go, and you shall walk as far as the end of the lane with me. It is very cruel for you to be sent away, merely because you have done what I should never have forgiven you for not doing."

As Julia concluded this speech she walked from the outer chamber of the cottage into the wood, and Susan followed her.

Here then, was a new and perfectly intelligible interpretation of this strange history—intelligible, but startling too. That Julia loved him many circumstances had led Alfred to believe, but that she should take such means to break off his marriage with Amelia shocked as much as it surprised him. There was a depravity both of feeling and principle in the act which was wonderfully at variance with what he had ever believed to be the character of Julia, but had he not heard it acknowledged? Could he doubt the testimony of his own senses? and then, as if this evidence were not sufficient, a thousand, thousand innocent proofs of her affection rose to his mind *to prove her guilty!*

That he was shocked, deeply shocked, is most certain, but something of the softness of pity mixed itself with his indignation, and a tear, one solitary tear, rose to his eye as he murmured to himself the words, "not wisely but too well."

His whole scheme of action was, however, changed by this discovery. It was quite evident that whatever Susan's conduct might have been while in London, she was no further guilty in the present instance, than having yielded to the passionate wishes of her unhappy mistress, in attempting to prevent his marriage with his angelic Amelia. He, therefore, determined to retreat from the cottage without executing the purpose for which he came, and far from wishing to send back the repentant Susan to fresh scenes of wickedness and temptation, he was glad at his heart that the unfortunate girl was under the shelter of her honest father's roof, where, it might be hoped, she would repent of, and forsake, her evil ways.

"The worthy Jenkins will only suppose I was tired of waiting," thought he, as he

sprang lightly over a fence which took him in a contrary direction from the lane by which Julia and Susan had departed, for he had no inclination to afford an opportunity to the latter, for the performance of the promise which he had heard extorted from her.

Shocking as he could not but feel the discovery of the meaning to have been, there was, nevertheless, something strangely soothing to his feelings in knowing that no slander rested upon the reputation of his Amelia, save what arose from the unmeasured love of poor Julia. But this soothing sort of sorrow could be shared by no one—no, not even with the divine Amelia herself, though such a proof that she had been right in her interpretation of Julia's motives respecting the loan, could not fail of being gratifying to her. But as he felt it was the only gratification he could ever wish to deny her, Alfred reconciled himself to it without much difficulty.

CHAPTER XI.

It is scarcely necessary to relate the obvious fact that Mrs. Verepoint, after the departure of Colonel Dermont, had repeated to her daughter and Miss Drummond all the most essential parts of Susan's terrible narrative; nor is it necessary to attempt describing Julia's feelings as she listened to it. The incredulity of the colonel did not at first in any great degree lessen her hope that Alfred would be saved from the dreadful fate which his blind passion had so nearly brought upon him, and it was only in her subsequent interview with Susan at her father's house, (whither she had immediately followed, when the poor girl was so ignominiously chased

from that of Mrs. Verepoint) that she began seriously to fear that her statement would not be productive of any effect whatever, excepting that of destroying her own character.

This fear was most painfully confirmed by a note from Colonel Dermont to Mrs. Verepoint, in which he informed her, with a little air of pardonable triumph at his own superior sagacity, that the whole mystery of Miss Susan Jenkins' statement had been most satisfactorily explained to him on his return home; and then he briefly communicated the leading particulars of Miss Thorwold's veracious narrative concerning her.

It was quite in vain that the miserable Julia, after the arrival of this note, endeavoured to revive Mrs. Verepoint's first predilection in favour of Susan. That excellent lady knew nothing personally of the girl, either good, or bad, except her decent appearance, and the simple but forcible style in which, as it had seemed to her at the time she had recounted her narrative respecting Miss Thorwold.

But this simple and forcible style of stating

slandrous falsehoods could not fail of being now remembered to her prejudice. The extreme improbability of the tale, stripped as it was of all the circumstances which might have explained it, made it easier to believe the contradiction, than the assertion of the facts, and good Mrs. Verepoint did believe the contradiction accordingly, and considered it as her duty to combat Julia's unjustifiable faith in her servant's wild and improbable statements, in preference to the perfectly natural refutation of them furnished by a young lady of high birth and consideration.

It was in consequence of Mrs. Verepoint's having taken this view of the case, in which her daughter, after listening to her reasonings on the subject, completely joined, that Julia felt obliged to make her interview with Susan a secret one. But though she succeeded in obtaining a pretty long conversation with the poor girl, she returned from it considerably more miserable than she went.

Had Susan been in the least degree aware of the nature of her young lady's feelings towards Alfred, she might not have given up

her attempt to save him from the wiles of Miss Thorwold so easily, but as it was she felt no motive strong enough to induce, or even to justify her in disobeying the commands of the family by interfering with their concerns. She had no power of obtaining proof of what she had asserted, and as her own character was not sufficiently known to obtain belief for her statements, the making them could do no good to any one.

The promise which Julia had exacted from her, was given greatly against her own judgment and inclination; for the representations which had reached her from the servants at the Mount, of the young squire's adoration of his affianced bride, convinced her that to repeat her story to him would only be to repeat the laying herself open to suspicion and rough language. Nevertheless it was her purpose to keep it, if accident favoured her with an opportunity of seeing him.

That she should seek him at his own house, Julia confessed would be a vain attempt, as it was not to be supposed that she

would obtain admission there; but she left her with a most earnest entreaty that she would watch for him wherever she thought he was most likely to be found.

And this, the good girl, notwithstanding her repugnance to the task, very faithfully intended to do; but her purpose was defeated, as may easily be imagined, by Alfred's foreknowledge of her intention.

Miss Thorwold meanwhile, though now pretty well assured that it was beyond the power of fate, or fortune, to prevent the marriage, which was fixed to take place on the following Tuesday (four days from that of poor Susan's discomfiture), thought that it might be as well to address a few lines to her excellent friend Mrs. Stedworth, a compliment which, to say truth, she had rather thoughtlessly neglected since her return to the country, in order to inform her of the present favourable state of her affairs, and also to prepare her to answer any questions respecting Susan in a proper manner. It must be remembered that the young lady knew nothing of the intimacy between Lord

William Hammond and the excellent Stedworth, nor of Susan's statement concerning it. Her letter to her humble friend was as follows:—

“ I ought to apologise to you a thousand times, my dear good Stedworth, for not having written before, but if you knew the persevering torment of '*young love*,' you would neither wonder at, nor blame me. All, however, is going famously well with me, and as courtship, thank Heaven, is generally cured by matrimony, I know that I shall be better able to find time to write to you after my marriage, than before it. I think the mother and father of my youthful Adonis are as much bewitched by my manifold perfections as the poor youth himself; for, from the very hour of my return, they have been driving post-haste to the wedding with quite as much zeal as myself. And now, I am happy to tell you, that the settlements are completed, and only await the arrival of my uncle for his signature. My lady aunt has done wonders for me in the important matter of wedding garments of all sorts, and the

happy day is fixed to be Tuesday. Let us hope, dear friend, that the business will be done more effectually this time than the last.

“All this, you will say, is very smooth sail—into port, and I can fancy you opening wide those marvellous eyes of yours, as you read, and exclaiming, ‘What luck!’ But what will you say when I tell you that this good luck, as you may well call it, has gone prosperously on without ever veering a point, in spite of two as boisterous gales as ever a well-rigged vessel, with a handsome figure-head, had the ill-luck to encounter. But what can ill-luck do against my star? Nothing—positively nothing, as you shall hear. The first storm that threatened blew right in my teeth in the shape of a horrid letter from a lawyer, threatening immediate arrest if the whole amount of my debts, which he had obligingly undertaken *en masse*, were not discharged immediately. I leave you to imagine my agreeable sensations. I very nearly fainted, but not quite, and by the time that my beautiful lips had recovered their roseate tint, I made up my mind what to do, and I

did it, my dear woman, with the most brilliant success. I composed a cock-and-a-bull story about my having put my name to a bill as security for a friend, and I got the whole sum paid with less difficulty than it used to cost me to pay my hairdresser—nor have I ever heard a single syllable upon the subject since. The second breeze was, if possible, more alarming still. Just imagine my turning round my head one fine morning, while enjoying in my own room a short respite from the ever-scorching fervour of my lover's love, and seeing full before me the face of your maid Susan, who used to have the honour of waiting upon my ladyship, when my ladyship was preparing for her downy pillow, in expectation of my lord! True, Mrs. Stedworth, upon my honour. Now would you not have thought that this might have been sufficient to bring on the concluding scene of my romance? Not a bit of it. The girl looked as much terrified as I could have done for the life of me—and left my presence without deigning to bestow a glance upon a handful of gold which I most

be bad in every way. My next letter will, I flatter myself, bear the illustrious signature of Dermont, but for the present you must accept an assurance of my constant friendship, vouched by no better name than that of Amelia Thorwold."

* * * * *

The marriage of the handsome young heir of the Mount was not, as we have said, likely to approach so near its conclusion without causing a good deal of sensation in the neighbourhood. The beauty of the young lady, and the nobility of her uncle, were sufficiently well known, and sufficiently appreciated, to render the connexion he was about to make, a matter of very general satisfaction; though one or two of the individuals the most advanced in life might probably have been observed to remark among themselves, that they did not remember to have heard any mention made of the amount of her fortune. But although little, or no fault was found in the marriage itself, a good deal of discontent was manifested on account of the private manner of it. The

Mount had done itself such immortal honour by the admirable style in which it had given its public breakfast, that most people thought it quite a pity they should let such a very tempting opportunity pass for doing something else upon the same extended scale. Excuses, however, were found for them in most quarters. Some thought that perhaps the old people would be too much agitated for any thing of the kind, and others dared to say that they would do something which would be sure to satisfy every body when the young people returned from their bridal excursion.

Offence, downright absolute personal offence was taken but in one quarter, and that quarter was Beech Hill. This one quarter must, however, be understood to include the individual indignation of Miss Celestina Marsh, as well as the territorial resentment of its owners ; for since the departure of her brother for Germany, Beech Hill had become almost constantly the home of Miss Celestina. In fact, the lady of that elegant little mansion found it quite impossible to do

without her ; for, as her situation became more interesting every day, it became more and more important that she should have somebody with her who could make tea, nay, be trusted with the key of the tea-box, and moreover ring the bell whenever her "Liebe" did not happen to be in the way.

In this manner the charming Celestina became, as Hamlet hath it, more theirs than their own, and it was, therefore, in common, that the indignation of Locklow Wood and Beech Hill was both felt and expressed.

"As to the town, and people of that standing," as our dear Americans say, "I think it is most abominably shabby and stingy, beyond all belief, not to give them something of a gala-party ; but these sort of people must be contented to wait for the first christening," said Mrs. Stephens, making a sign to Celestina to arrange her footstool more commodiously. "But as to their not asking us, when the Verepoints, Ripleys, Mrs. Knight, and young Foster, are all going, it is something so like personal impertinence, that I shall not forgive it in a hurry, I promise

you. All these, you know, are exactly our own set, and that is what makes our not being asked, so very particular. I don't care a straw about all the more distant invitations, because as yet our acquaintance in the county has been confined to the neighbourhood of Stoke. But to be left out of our own particular set, is a degree of impertinence that even my temper cannot stand."

"It is just like them," replied Miss Marsh, with a very sour-looking frown. "But if I were you, dearest, I would snap my fingers at them all. There is not one of the whole party that is fit, in point of superiority of mind and all that, to wipe the dust off your shoes, nor Stephens's either. I am sure you must both of you despise them in your hearts, for it is impossible you can help it."

"Dear creature!" returned her friend, with a succession of affectionate little nods, "I do believe in my heart, my poor dear Celestina, that you are the only individual in the whole country who can thoroughly appreciate us. In short, you are the only one who has capacity to understand us.

Your brother might have done it. I quite felt that; but his poor dear head was perfectly turned by Charlotte Verepoint's quiet little sentimental style of flirting with him. I know they both thought I was as blind as a mole, but they were quite mistaken, and your brother, poor fellow, is terribly out in his calculations if he fancies the heiress of the Grange has any serious thoughts about him. You may take my word for it, my dear, she would as soon marry her mother's butler."

"I'm sure I don't care who she marries, nasty, stiff little wretch," replied Celestina; "my belief is that she will never marry at all, she looks so exactly like an old maid."

"So she does, Celestina! That's monstrous true," returned Mrs. Stephens, laughing heartily. "That little precise look of hers is stamped with old maidism all over. What a dear droll creature you are? Do you know I have the greatest mind in the world to get up a little opposition party on Tuesday, and get Ford and some of the other officers. You must forgive poor Ford about

I hate him for coming here, sneaking, in the hope of getting the business away from Richards. I delight in Richards, he is so gentle and tender in his manner with one !”

“Oh! I am not speaking of him as an apothecary, you know; indeed, I believe he does not call himself an apothecary at all, and they say he is only come here in the hope of recovering his spirits, after the death of his wife. I am sure you would like him, if you knew him, he is so exceedingly gentleman-like, and quite in your own way, by what I have heard the Murrays say, about science and America, you know, and every thing liberal and superior, quite like you and Mr. Stephens.”

“Is he indeed? Why did you never tell me so before?” demanded Mrs. Stephens, rather sharply.

“I did not tell you, dearest love,” replied Miss Marsh, “because I did not know any thing about it myself till I was asked to spend the day with the Murrays just before I came here this time; and then Captain Murray was talking about him all dinner-

you suppose I should care about whether he gets business or not?"

"Oh! I don't know, I am sure, but one never can tell, my dear;—such very odd things do happen, you know. But I will tell you something, Celestina, that has just this moment come into my head. Would it not be good fun to have a breakfast party on the day of the wedding? I do not mean a public breakfast, of course—I could not bear the fatigue of it now, whatever I may do next summer,—but just a gay, laughing, friendly party of about ten perhaps, which just fills our table. They cannot help passing our gates, you know; every carriage, if they muster a hundred, must positively come this way, for there is no other, and if we all go out and give them a good stare, it will just be serving them right. What do you think of it?"

"I think it is a capital notion, so like you! But who should you have, dear love?"

"Why, I would have the Murrays, and tell them to bring their new friend, Mr. Macnab, in order to introduce him. Don't

you think it would be a nice opportunity of making the acquaintance ?”

“ Delightful !” exclaimed Miss Marsh, with sudden glee, “ I do really think you are the most charming woman in the world. I hope Mr. Stephens will approve it !”

“ No fear of that, dear,” replied the happy wife. “ My dearest William has no will but mine !”

* * * * *

CHAPTER XII.

THE days wore themselves away to hours, and the morning fixed for the marriage of Alfred and Amelia, arose bright in autumnal sunshine. The little park at the Mount, at a very early hour of the morning, presented a scene of the most pleasing gaiety. Tents were pitched under the shelter of such trees as still preserved their leaves, and a very large assemblage of the neighbouring cottagers were laying out (by permission) their bread and cheese breakfasts on the turf; abundant supplies of these comforts, accompanied by a very liberal allowance of ale, having been lodged under the canvass at an earlier hour still.

It had been arranged that the marriage was to take place in the parish church at ten, and after the ceremony, a most splendid breakfast table was to receive the bridesfolk and their friends in the dining-room. The drawing-room, with the choicest green-house flowers, blooming from every table, and from every stand, was to receive the guests as they arrived, and into this room the lovely bride had promised to enter in her bridal array, as soon as she should be informed that the whole company was assembled, and having there received the blushing honours which were sure to greet her, Lord Ripley was to lead her to his own carriage, in which she was to be conveyed for the last time as Amelia Thorwold. Alfred's new equipage sent down from London for the occasion, was to follow the procession unoccupied, the young man taking his place as heretofore with his father and mother, in the family carriage, and then, the hands of the happy lovers being united, they were on their return to head the procession together, their road being strewed with flowers by all the young girls

in the village, except Susan Jenkins and her sister Nancy.

In short, the programme of the whole ceremony was arranged with great care, and every thing promised fair to do honour to the Mount, and to the joyful occasion.

But it took some time to assemble all the company; the more distant neighbours arriving rather early, and the nearer ones rather late. Under such circumstances, the conversation of the first comers could hardly fail of being a little stiff and embarrassed, and as, for at least half an hour, it really consisted of little more than a repetition of the phrases "I really fear we are come too early," and, "I think I see another carriage coming," it may as well be left without further record, while we inquire a little after Lord William Hammond, and Mrs. Stedworth. The reader, however, may be assured that we will come back in time.

* * * * *

The fascinating nobleman of whom we have so long lost sight, continued to remain

received, fully justified his Grace of Watertown in declaring, that his brother William *might* provide for himself, if he would.

But although the affair appeared to be going on as prosperously as possible, his lordship could not immediately reap any ready money profit by it, and he therefore found it extremely convenient to continue as a lodger and boarder in the house of Mrs. Stedworth. That estimable lady had indeed taken a great fancy to him, and, as they were sufficiently intimate to be quite confidential on some points, Mrs. Stedworth was quite aware that her noble friend had literally not wherewith to pay his washerwoman in ready money.

Now Mrs. Stedworth had of late years been exceedingly fortunate in all her pecuniary transactions, and had bought cheap and sold dear, to a much greater extent than any of her acquaintance were aware. A long lease of the house she lived in, and all its furniture, belonged to her, and she had, moreover, the sum of four thousand pounds in the Three per Cents. Mrs. Stedworth knew perfectly well that when a gentleman hap-

was hardly probable that all the world would listen with such perfect incredulity as the Dermont family had displayed. She determined, therefore, to put this letter in the van of her proposal to his lordship, thinking that at any rate it would make a very good opening for her proposal.

It has been said that the intimacy between Lord William Hammond and Mrs. Stedworth was quite confidential. Confidential it certainly was, but the quite was a word of doubtful propriety, inasmuch as both the lady and the gentleman had each of them one point, at least, upon which they were *not* "quite confidential." Lord William had never told Mrs. Stedworth that he was making "very fierce love" to Miss Upton Savage; and Mrs. Stedworth had never told Lord William that she had taken the trouble of going to church to hear his banns published, although at that time she had not the pleasure of any personal acquaintance with him; neither did she mention that, not contented with having had the honour of seeing the marriage ceremony performed, she had

since revisited the church and obtained an authenticated copy of that portion of the register which testified that the said ceremony had been duly and regularly celebrated. Nevertheless, Lord William Hammond and Mrs. Stedworth were very intimate, and very confidential friends, and they sat down tête-à-tête together to a late supper of oysters and porter, with a degree of familiarity which set all ceremony and distinction of rank at defiance.

“What should I do without you, my dear Stedy?” said his lordship, as soon as he had heard of the alarm occasioned by Miss Thorwold’s interview with Susan. “You keep me here, darling, as safely shut up as if I were in a fortress. I defy my creditors, and snap my fingers at the gossips. What a dear good creature you are ! I’ll be hanged if I know what I should do without you.”

“I have a plan in my head, my Lord William,” she replied, “that would serve you better than playing bo-peep in Half-Moon-street. Do not you think that a little excursion to Paris, in company with a friend

who dearly cares for you, and furnished with a thousand, or it may be two, of golden sovereigns, would be better for your health and spirits, than passing the autumn in London ?”

“ Yes, sooth, and troth, do I, Goody Stedworth,” replied his lordship, laughing, “ and if I had got you and your sovereigns there, if there was a gay cab to be had for love or money, I would show the Italian Boulevards how a handsome English woman could look, when perfectly well dressed, even if she were a little trifle passed sixteen. I’ll be hanged if the thought does not make me feel like a school-boy talking of the holidays.”

Delighted by the flattering compliment, and the perspective of pleasure which she had sketched for herself, and upon which her admired friend had thrown so bright an accidental light by his simile, Mrs. Stedworth took the liberty of snatching the hand of his lordship, which was at that moment gracefully supporting his aristocratic head, and suddenly imparting a kiss upon it, said:

"Speak but the word, Lord William, and the money shall be ready in three hours."

"Why, you dear, handsome, insinuating old witch," returned his lordship, with a smile which, to the eyes of his enamoured hostess, seemed to have some slight tincture of scorn in it; "what do you take me for? Do you really think and believe, my darling goody, that gentlemen of my station can indulge themselves so freely in gambols as a lady of yours? Why, I should have half the peerage sneering at me, as a pitiable sample of lordly weakness, and the other half gently hinting to their ladies, when they were making out their invitation lists next season, that Lord William must positively be scratched out, because he was too bad for any thing."

"Then you are determined not to go with me?" said Mrs. Stedworth, interrogatively.

"Yes, my charming creature, quite determined," he replied.

About ten minutes before these last definitive words were spoken, there might have

been found, perhaps, on the heart of Mrs. Stedworth, had it been carefully anatomised, a tolerably distinct impression of characters, forming the words "LADY WILLIAM HAMMOND." The fact with which she happened to be so particularly well acquainted, respecting the recent bestowal of that name upon another, in no degree lessened her inclination to bear it, *pro tempore*, amongst some of her former friends and acquaintance at Paris ; on the contrary, indeed, the perfect ease with which this circumstance would enable her to wear the title, knowing that she could throw it off the moment it became troublesome, greatly increased her wish to assume it. But the speech of his lordship not only completely effaced these characters, but scratched upon her susceptible heart the word VENGEANCE in the place of them.

Though his lordship did not see the lady's heart, he did her eyes, and read in them that he had vexed her a good deal ; whereupon, thinking that he knew her thoroughly, and that she was a woman of too much good sense and experience, not at once to feel the

force of the argument, he laid his hand upon her knee, and said:

"Goody Stedworth, you and I are no longer young enough to run our heads against stone walls, when we can find pillows of down ready at hand. Perhaps you have heard, my dear good woman, of the celebrated manufacturing heiress, Miss Upton Savage? Instead of having such eyes as yours, the light gray machinery by which she gazes on my attractive features, moves on swivels not quite at her own command; and her locks, as unlike as possible to these sable corkscrews, gleam with a red light that is terrific. Nevertheless, my excellent Mrs. Stedworth, I am going to marry her."

Mrs. Stedworth looked steadily in his lordship's face for a moment, and he looked in hers. But her face, though the best worth looking at, was by far the least intelligible of the two. *She* saw that his lordship was quite in earnest, and had really opened his heart to her with the most perfect sincerity; but he did *not* see, that when she replied, "Going to be married to Miss Upton Sa-

vage! Are you indeed, my lord?"—her heart whispered aside to her own soul, "Going to be married to Miss Upton Savage! You think so do you?"

And thus this confidential interview ended more profitably to the lady than to the gentleman, for whereas she had got at his secret, and learned that he was making love to Miss Upton Savage, and intended to marry her, he had not got at hers, nor conceived the slightest suspicion that she knew as well as he did himself, that he had a lawful wife already.

tirely and completely disbelieved it, Julia as entirely and completely did the contrary. She had tried, and tried in vain, to make Miss Verepoint and her mother feel that some further inquiry ought to be made, but they both laughed at her, and assured her that it required all the innocent credulity of seventeen to be taken in for a single instant by such outrageous absurdity. Julia therefore crept away to her own room, and wept in secret, never losing, however, to the very last the hope that Susan would keep her promise, and endeavour' to persuade Alfred himself to take some measures for either proving or disproving the truth of her narrative. But when that *last* arrived, and brought no news from Susan, she began herself to be shaken in her faith of the poor girl's honesty, and to suspect that the years she had passed amidst the celebrated wickedness of the great city had really corrupted her old play-fellow. Nevertheless she felt such a degree of increased repugnance to the being present at the marriage ceremony, which far from decreasing as the time approached, became too powerful

for any arguments to conquer; she mistrusted her own resolution, and felt so strongly persuaded, that even if she forced herself to enter the church, she should infallibly run away when she saw the ceremony actually in progress, that she at length decided upon giving up the attempt. It was not necessary for her, poor girl, to feign any excuse for her absence, for having passed a totally sleepless night, she was too really ill in the morning to quit her bed, so having left her to the care of Sophy, Mrs. Verepoint and her daughter departed, and it must be confessed that, during the course of their short drive, they did acknowledge to each other that, dearly as they really loved Julia, they could not but fear that it was a too great affection for Alfred which had made her so anxious that the absurd story of Susan should be believed, and which now rendered her incapable of being present at his marriage. They greatly disliked the task of announcing her absence, but on this point they gave themselves more uneasiness than was necessary, for the intense interest which all the persons concerned took in the

business that was going forward, rendered it absolutely impossible for any of them to do more than exclaim, "Ill? really! how very unlucky!"

The complexion of Alfred himself, indeed, was a good deal heightened by the intelligence knowing so very well, as he did, the cause of it. And if a sigh, breathed very secretly, but from the bottom of his heart, could have cured her, poor Julia would have been no longer a sufferer.

But Mrs. Verepoint and her daughter were the last of the expected guests. Alfred looked round and saw that every thing was now ready for the entrée of his lovely bride. Was it possible at that moment that he could long think of any body else? It is, however, certain, that even at that moment there was a considerable degree of tender feeling at the bottom of his heart for Julia and for all her faults; but even this rather increased than diminished his passionate love for his beautiful Amelia, for did he not know that she was regarded with all the bitterness of jealousy for his sake? Yes, he did know it, and

for that reason he would love and cherish her more fondly still.

But why does she tarry? No, no, she tarryes not! A slight murmur is heard from among the crowd of servants assembled in the hall. The drawing-room door has already been thrown open for her reception. Every eye is fixed upon it, and at length she appears.

With the slow and lingering step of a bashful bride, yet with the easy, graceful movement of assured beauty, Amelia Thorwold glided into the room, followed by two pretty bridemaids, who were, however, as completely thrown into insignificant nothingness, by her transcendant loveliness, as the smallest little twinkler in the summer sky, by the presence of the blazing Jupiter.

Her dress, of rich white satin, fell around her in folds that Vandyke would have studied for hours; while floating over it, like the light vapour over the graceful fall of a full cataract, hung a three-fold tunic of silk gauze, that looked, as a sunbeam darted through its shining folds, like a delicate ema-

nation from the brilliant texture under it. On her head she wore a small, closely-woven wreath of orange blossoms mixed with the bright small leaves of the orange myrtle; and a costly veil of the finest Brussels lace, attached to the rich coronet of plaited hair, which finished her head-dress, fell over her whole person, her fair face alone excepted, which looked out from beneath the delicate cloud, like the beauteous star of evening at that soft season of the year when Venus rules, and when "lovers love the western star."

She certainly did look as beautiful as it was well possible for a woman to do, and as the exquisitely soft bloom which mantled her cheek, appeared rather like the blush of an angel, than a symptom of modesty in any thing earthly,—what if this bloom had been deposited on that exquisite cheek by the touch of her own skilful hand? What difference could that possibly make to any one who looked at her? None whatever. Mrs. Knight probably knew all about it, and my Lord Ripley also, but there was not the slightest danger that, upon this occasion, at

to dispatch than ceremony—for every one felt that the lovely bride must not be kept waiting at the church, the good colonel having assiduously handed every body in the party to some carriage or other, found that the only person left as a companion to himself was a young legal gentleman, sent down by the solicitor who had prepared the settlements, in order to see them properly executed, and then to convey them to their proper strong box at Lord Ripley's solicitors in Lincoln's-inn.

The old gentleman was at that moment too gay and too happy to care a farthing who was to be his companion on the road, provided it was no one likely to delay him in his progress to the holy fane wherein he hoped to see the happiness of his darling son secured by the possession of the lovely creature who seemed by universal consent to be declared worthy even of the high honour of becoming his wife.

As Colonel Dermont crossed the hall with the last lady who remained to be handed to a carriage, he perceived that the newspapers

and letters, which were usually brought to the breakfast-table about this time, had been thrown, in the hurry of the hour, upon the hall table, and as he passed close beside it, he selected one addressed to himself. Having deposited the lady in the last carriage but one, and then followed the young lawyer into the last, he began to break the seal of his letter, but it was done with great indifference, for the hand was quite unknown to him; but yet feeling as if he had not much to say to his companion, he thought it would be a good excuse for being silent. Having, therefore, civilly said, "By your leave, sir," to the young lawyer, he deliberately put on his spectacles, and perused, as rapidly as his agitation would let him, the following letter:—

"To Colonel Dermont.

"Sir,"

"I have been informed, on what I fear is extremely good authority, that your son and heir is about to marry—I would say is about to lead to the hymeneal altar, a young

lady, still calling herself Amelia Thorwold, but who, in fact, has no longer any right to that name, as on the thirtieth day of last August she was married by banns in the parish church of St. —, in the Borough, to the Right Honourable Lord William Hammond, second son to the late Duke of Watertown. That this lady will have rendered herself highly culpable in the eyes of yourself and family, by permitting herself to promise marriage to your son, after living with Lord William for several weeks as his wife, there can be no manner of doubt; but I must do her the justice to say that she is at this moment labouring under the delusive persuasion that the ceremony which united her to Lord William Hammond was a fictitious one. The guilt of having thus deceived her must lie at his lordship's door, as may be easily shown, if her ladyship has preserved the letter which she received from Lord William at my house the day before she left London for your seat at Stoke, called the Mount. That her ladyship has been very far from conducting herself properly, I am quite ready to allow, and

I assure you, sir, that I am very sorry for it, because I have for years considered her as one of the handsomest and most intelligent young ladies of my acquaintance. It is, therefore, painful to me to feel myself called upon, as I certainly do, to prevent the unpleasant consequences which might accrue to all the parties concerned, were this illegal connexion to take place, by what must, I fear, lead to rather a public exposure of her improper behaviour in the business. I flatter myself, however, that she will derive a degree of satisfaction from knowing herself entitled to the name and rank of Lady William Hammond, and the position of sister-in-law to the very stylish Duke and Duchess of Watertown, which may, in part, compensate to her for the mortification of losing the esteem of your respectable family, and the handsome settlement which a marriage with your son would have ensured her. If she does not derive consolation from her name and title, I know not, indeed, where she is to look for it, for it is quite certain that a more contemptible animal than her

husband does not exist. I regret this exceedingly for her sake; but there is no help for it. There is one point, indeed, upon which she may take her stand in the attribute of a lady of honour, and perform thereby a highly moral action. Her very worthless husband, Lord William Hammond, is at this time, paying his addresses to the great city heiress Miss Upton Savage, and either is, or is likely to be, accepted by that cruelly deceived young lady. I would beg to submit to Lady William, to whom, before you part from her, you will, I hope, show this communication, that it is her bounden duty to announce to Miss Upton Savage, without delay, the fact of her perfidious lover's being already a married man. I have the pleasure of informing her ladyship also, that his grace the Duke of Watertown is still in London, and that it may be advisable also to announce the fact of her marriage, to him and his illustrious duchess, as speedily as possible.

“Should you, or your son, or Lady William herself, feel any doubt as to the authenticity

of this information, I beg to refer all or any of you, to the parish church of St. — aforesaid, and to the Reverend Samuel Birdaway, the Rector, who I myself heard publish the banns, and whom I myself saw and heard perform the marriage ceremony, to the record of which in the register I signed my name. I herewith annex a copy of the certificate of the marriage, which I subsequently obtained from the reverend gentleman, and beg to subscribe myself,

“ Your obedient humble servant,

“ CAROLINE STEDWORTH.

“ Half-Moon-street, Piccadilly.

“ P. S. I fear that the money obtained by the young lady from your son, for the payment of her various bills is lost to your family for ever.”

The first feeling demonstrated by Colonel Dermont, as he read this letter, was a sort of delirious wish to stop the carriage, and it was only his companion's polite eagerness to assist him which so far calmed his agitation,

and restored him to his senses, as to enable him to remember that there was no danger that the ceremony would begin before his arrival, and, moreover, that the quickest way of getting to the church would be suffering the horses to go on, instead of stopping them. But this restoration to common sense and presence of mind, very little mended his condition, which was, indeed, most truly pitiable. Notwithstanding his many substantial good qualities, Colonel Dermont was undeniably a very proud man, and to find himself, his lady, and their almost worshipped son, suddenly cast from the very highest pinnacle of popular admiration, and prosperous self-gratulation, into a situation so very deplorably the reverse, was a good deal more than his philosophy could stand.

Never before in the whole course of his very comfortable life, had the worthy colonel felt any movement of temper that might reasonably have been termed *furious*, but now he did. Alfred! *His* Alfred! SUCH an Alfred! That the abject victim of a dissolute lordling's infamous treachery should

have been congratulated by all the first families of the county, as the bride of his peerless son, and the future mistress of the Mount, was an idea that almost drove him mad, and he clenched his fists, ground his teeth, and rolled his eyes, in a style that very seriously alarmed his astonished companion.

Just at the moment when the paroxysm had reached its highest pitch, the line of carriages arrived at that part of the road which was most distinctly visible from the windows and lawn of Beech Hill.

"Do let us show them, that notwithstanding their abominable rudeness in not inviting us, we can be quite as gay as they are!" exclaimed the lively mistress of the mansion, as the first carriage appeared in sight.

"Heaven forbid we should not!" replied her sympathising husband, throwing up the sash, and laughing heartily.

"Yes, indeed! Heaven forbid we should not!" cried Mr. Macnab, suddenly seizing Miss Celestina Marsh in his powerful Scotch arms, and safely depositing her on the gravel walk before the window. Whereupon all

the company laughed as loudly and as perseveringly as Mrs. Stephens herself could desire.

And then one or two young officers jumped out of the window after Miss Celestina, and then the two Miss Murrays and Mr. Macnab did the same, every body laughing all the time most vociferously.

Whether these frolicsome sights and sounds were as distinctly heard and seen by the rest of the wedding party, as they were by the unfortunate Colonel Dermont, I know not ; but to him they appeared like the shouts and gambols of insulting merriment occasioned by the horrible position in which the Dermont family had placed themselves, by parading an infamous woman through the parish, and triumphantly declaring to all the world that they had selected her as a wife for their son !

As he raised his eyes in a perfect agony of rage to the shouting group, a sudden revulsion of feeling took place, and the sort of dignified contempt which the noisy vulgarity of the scene inspired, restored the well-bred old gentleman to his senses.

"But he is not married to her!" he said aloud, in a voice that expressed more of pleasure than of pain. "He is not married to her," he repeated, with deep thankfulness; and all the horror, the exposure, the suffering, which must have ensued, had he not chanced to take up the tremendous letter as he passed through the hall, rushed so vividly upon his mind, that, instead of sorrow and anger, he felt nothing but thankfulness and joy. For one moment he sat with clasped hands and closed eyes, silently thanking Heaven for their deliverance, and then, having meditated for a moment, he said to his companion, "I beg your pardon, Mr. Lawrence, for having frightened you, as I am sure I must have done, by the violent emotion to which this letter has given rise. Read it, sir: the matter it contains is not of a nature to remain secret. Read it, Mr. Lawrence, and I think you will excuse my violence. A little reflection, however, has turned all my anger to thankfulness."

The young man took the letter, and having perused it, said, "You have, indeed, reason to be thankful, Colonel Dermont; for

though the ceremony which has been so very near solemnization, could not have bound your son to this unprincipled young woman by any legal tie, the having to prove this publicly must have been a very disagreeable business."

"Doubtless, sir, doubtless," replied the colonel. "I feel that it is impossible to be too thankful for this timely letter, though it is impossible not to wish that it had been more timely still. I would to Heaven we had got it yesterday! But this is both ungrateful and idle. Will you, sir, give me the advantage of your advice as to the best mode of making this extraordinary discovery known to the party who are even now entering the church. It will be dreadful for my son—startling to our good clergyman—painful to every body! I even pity the wretched young woman herself—and her uncle, poor man! If he loves her, if he cares for her, as the child of his brother, and as bearing the name of his race, his situation must be terrible. For Heaven's

sake tell me, Mr. Lawrence, to whom had I better first address myself?"

Fortunately, Mr. Lawrence was a sensible cool-headed, gentlemanlike young man, who, seeing that there was no time to spare, for the first carriage had already drawn off to make way for the second, promptly replied,

"I think, sir, that in the first instance you should take Lord Ripley apart, and put the letter into his hands. I, if you will give me leave, will prevent the clergyman from placing himself at the altar, by telling him that a letter has reached you which must prevent the performance of the ceremony. To your son, sir, you will of course address yourself, if possible, in private—perhaps you can lead him to the church porch: and for the rest of the company—they will all become acquainted with the facts, somehow or other, in a wonderfully short space of time."

By the time the young man had ceased speaking, they had drawn sufficiently near the church] for Colonel Dermont to follow this reasonable advice immediately. There

were still two more carriages to set down their company besides the one he occupied, but he called to the servant, who sat beside the coachman, and ordered him to let him out. This was instantly done, and Mr. Lawrence followed him.

Lord Ripley, his niece, and Mrs. Knight together with Mrs. Dermont, Alfred, the bridesmaids, and the clergyman, were already in the vestry, at the door of which the colonel paused, almost overpowered by the sight of his son, who, radiant with happiness, was already standing close beside his bride, seeming as if he had no eyes to see any thing else.

"Ask Lord Ripley to come out, Lawrence," said the agitated colonel, making way for the young man to pass into the room.

His lordship immediately obeyed the summons, and with a smiling, lordly, full-dressed air, which seemed anticipating some little consultation on the etiquette of the ceremony, bowed his way past the group amidst which he stood, and left the vestry.

The colonel awaited him at no great dis-

tance, but it was out of sight of those whom he had left. He had placed his arm upon the font for support, and he had really need of it, for he was greatly agitated, but when Lord Ripley approached, he recovered himself sufficiently to make one step forward, and then put the terrible document into his lordship's hand, with more of dignity than embarrassment. Lord Ripley raised his eyebrows with a look of considerable astonishment at having such an employment offered him at such a moment.

"May I suggest, Colonel Dermont," said he, "that this, whatever it is, should be submitted to my attention after the ceremony? My niece and Mrs. Knight are standing in the vestry, and—"

"I beg your lordship's pardon," replied the colonel, rather drily, "but if your lordship will peruse that document, you will perceive that it had better be read *before* the ceremony."

The complexion of Lord Ripley was slightly heightened. The tone of Colonel Dermont startled him, and a vague misgiving that something was wrong, caused him

to turn his eyes upon the letter with more of haste, and less of elegance than he had yet displayed.

A very short space of time was now sufficient to cause the lips of the peer to tremble, and his whole aspect to change.

"This is an infamous libel, sir," he exclaimed, in a voice trembling with passion, of which it is probable that the colonel was not the real object. He played his part, however, extremely well, and looked as fiercely at Colonel Dermont as if quite determined to call him out.

"It is impossible, sir," he continued, "that you can really put any faith in such a vile and perfectly unsubstantiated statement as this, neither will I believe it possible for a moment that you can design to put such an affront upon my niece, as must be conceived to be intended, if you postpone the ceremony. Let me retain this letter, sir, which I will undertake to answer as it deserves, and let me request you to return to the outraged young lady in the vestry."

"As the letter is addressed to me, Lord

Ripley, I must request you to return it into my hands," replied the colonel, perfectly restored to composure by his lordship's blustering manner, "and I am now ready to return with you to the vestry." The bravado of Lord Ripley was not more sedative in its effect, than was now the composure of the colonel. "Give me leave, sir, to run my eye once more over this strange epistle," said his lordship, "and I will then restore it to you."

Colonel Dermont resumed his station near the font, and waited till every word of the letter had been re-perused.

"This paper asserts that my niece is Lady William Hammond, and sister-in-law to the Duke of Watertown," said Lord Ripley, returning the paper to the colonel; "and if this be so, it is quite impossible I can object to the connexion, which is decidedly one of the first in England. There must, I suspect, have been some lover's quarrel between Lord William and his lady, and probably this letter is written at the instigation of his lordship. But it is certainly rather a rough

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mode of winning her back again. However, it is plain that all that Lady William's family can do, is to make the best of it ; and I am sure that, in this, you must agree with me, Colonel Dermont?"

"Most decidedly, my lord," returned the colonel, with something a little like a smile; "and I wish you every success in so laudable an endeavour. It will be desirable, I think, that your lordship should announce the arrival of this intelligence to the Lady William Hammond, and I think I may venture to undertake the task of consoling my son."

There can be little doubt that the Lord Viscount Ripley would at that moment have found considerable relief, could he with safety have requested Colonel Dermont to betake himself to the regions below; but his heartless depravity had so thoroughly aroused the spirit of our worthy colonel, that the peer felt discretion to be decidedly the better part of valour, and he therefore bowed without making any reply, and walked gracefully away towards the vestry.

The time occupied by the reading and re-

reading of the letter, together with the short discussion which followed, was not long. Nevertheless, both Alfred and Mrs. Knight had begun to murmur at the delay. The clergyman, too, had disappeared, which Miss Thorwold observed to Mrs. Knight was excessively rude of him. But at length Lord Ripley and Colonel Dermont were seen through the vestry door returning together, or at least, if not exactly together, following each other very closely.

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed Alfred, "here they come at last."

His lordship entered first, and without appearing to see any other person present, walked up to Mrs. Knight, and offering his arm, said: "It is necessary I should speak to you for a few minutes, Mrs. Knight."

The lady was a little surprised, but she took the offered arm, and proposed to accompany him.

"I wish you to come with us, Amelia," added his lordship, but without offering her his other arm; upon which Alfred, who of course was standing close beside her, offered

his, which she took, saying to him in a whisper: "What is all this about, I wonder!"

At the door of the vestry, Lord Ripley looked round, and perceiving how his niece was accompanied, stopped for a moment, and said with very perfect *nonchalance*, "By your leave, Mr. Alfred Dermont, my niece must follow me alone."

Alfred stared at him with a degree of surprise that seemed to conquer every other feeling. But he obeyed, and tenderly pressing the hand he held, he suffered her to withdraw it, and pass without him through the vestry door, which Lord Ripley, first waving her forward, closed behind him.

"What is all this tedious delay for, my dear sir?" said Alfred, addressing his father. "I never was present at any other wedding, so I presume that every thing is in perfect form and order, but I had no idea that there were so many preliminaries necessary."

Colonel Dermont stood for a moment uncertain what to do or what to say. He dreaded the effect of the disclosure he had to make too much to wish that so many persons

should be present to witness it. Yet he could not leave the little room in order to lead his son into the church, without the risk of encountering the persons he was most anxious to avoid, now and for ever.

But the eye of Alfred was upon him, and though, when half a moment ago he inquired the cause of the delay, his fine countenance had displayed no symptom of serious uneasiness, a shade of anxiety was already settling upon it, which showed plainly that something must immediately be decided on. In short, there seemed to be no alternative; for, to follow Amelia was out of the question, and therefore, raising his voice so as at once to command the attention of every one present, he said, "Will you all, my kind friends, forgive a very painful necessity, which will soon be explained to you, will you forgive me if I entreat you to leave me alone with my son and his mother for a few moments?"

Whether they could forgive him or not, for a degree of mystery so exceedingly tormenting, mattered little. The wondering company, bridesmaids and all, were obliged to

submit, and in the next moment the young man stood alone between his father and mother.

"My dearest Alfred!" said the pitying father, remembering as by one effort of memory all the passionate love of which he had witnessed the display, "my dearest Alfred, you have a dreadful trial to bear. Let me implore you, for my sake and your mother's, to bear up against it with courage and with moderation in your grief. Read this!"

The young man took the letter, and retired with it to the window, and, while his eyes eagerly devoured the contents, the colonel whispered in the ear of his terrified wife, "It is all true! The whole of poor Susan's frightful story is true!" And these few words having been spoken, and heard, the father and mother stood side by side with their eyes fixed upon their adored son, and trembling, both of them, literally from head to foot, lest they should see him overwhelmed even to death by the fatal tidings.

Alfred read the letter to the end; he neither missed a single word of it, nor felt it

necessary to read a single word of it twice. Having finished, he folded it up deliberately and turning round his unblanched and unflushed cheek to his parents, walked quietly towards them, and restored the momentous document to his father's keeping. Their eyes were bent upon him as if they would have started from their sockets.

"Why do you both look at me with such fearful anxiety?" said he. "Is it possible that you can suppose I should feel any touch of sorrow, any particle of regret at being made acquainted with the disgusting facts communicated by that letter?"

The tone in which he spoke was so much less like that of an outraged, broken-hearted lover, than of a high-minded man, disdaining what is vile too sincerely to resent it, that his father, who had literally been afraid to look at him, lest his agony should be more vehemently impressed on his features than a father's heart could bear, now raised his eyes to his face with a feeling more akin to curiosity than to fear. And his eyes, once again fixed upon those speaking features,

continued to gaze as if they never intended to lose sight of them again. A new spirit, a new intelligence, a new era of existence, seemed to have come upon Alfred, and though the expression of his noble brow was severely grave, there was an expression of conscious power within himself, that gave more of triumph than of sorrow to his aspect.

“ Alas ! alas ! my poor darling Alfred ! ” exclaimed his mother, who was engaged in wiping a very genuine shower of tears from her eyes, “ how will he ever survive the loss of what he so doated upon ? ”

“ Alas ! and alas ! my darling mother ! ” repeated Alfred, “ how vilely must I, through my whole life, have abused your fond indulgence ! How vilely must I have yielded myself to all the naughty wilfulness of a spoiled child, since all you know of me teaches you to believe that I am likely to die of grief for the loss of such a lady as this ! Oh ! mother ! dearest mother ! when, since the hour in which I first drew breath, have I ever had such cause to bless the merciful

had not their fears and sorrows immediately been changed to rejoicing.

This short, but most satisfactory conclusion to the melo-dramatic performances of the morning having brought the principal performers into a very agreeable state of mind, they began to remember the awkward position of the assistants.

"Lose no time, my dear father, in making your farewell compliments to the friends so absurdly called together. I know of nothing that you can say to them, save so much of the truth as shall make them understand that the fair lady is claimed by another. However much the parties may deserve exposure, I would not wish that we should take the task of retribution on ourselves. The circumstances stated in this letter are, most of them, I fear, of a nature to become more than sufficiently public, without our assistance."

"The precaution comes too late, Alfred," replied his father. "I have already shown the precious scroll to Mr. Lawrence, and upon my word it never occurred to me to bind him to secrecy. And now then for this

moment more of agitation in the manner of the young man than he had yet displayed ; but, perhaps, because he was conscious of a rushing of blood to his face which made his ears tingle. He was employing his pocket-handkerchief in a manner that concealed the greater part of his countenance. "I wish, sir," said he, "you would tell Mrs. Verepoint that I should consider it as a very great act of kindness if she would go home directly, and take me with her. She will understand, I am sure, that it would be disagreeable for me to return to the Mount just now."

"Certainly, my dear fellow ; no doubt of it, no doubt of it," and, so saying, the colonel made his exit into the church, and found the whole party standing, with the clergyman in the midst of them, as completely in "amazement lost," as it was well possible for an intelligent set of ladies and gentlemen to be. Having expressed his hopes very cordially, that, notwithstanding the astounding occurrence which had so startled them all, the whole party would

assemble at the Mount, he took Mrs. Verepoint aside, and delivered Alfred's message to her.

"Of course, my dear colonel," replied the kind lady, "it is easy to imagine what his feelings must be ; and I declare to you that I have been too much shocked myself, to feel at all disposed to join a large party. Poor, dear young man ! What a pity it was that you would not listen with a little more patience to that good young woman !"

"No more of that, my dear lady, I entreat you ! Trust me, I am heartily ashamed of myself, and shall probably for the rest of my life, believe every thing that a lady's maid says to me, let it be as improbable as it may. Alas ! alas ! How I did rate the poor girl. And every word she uttered, as true as the gospel all the time !"

* * * * *

The party returning to the Mount lost no time in replacing themselves in their respective carriages, and when they had fairly driven out of sight, the deserted bridegroom came forth from the vestry, and without

speaking a word to either, offered an arm to Mrs. Verepoint and to her daughter, and led them to their carriage which was now the only one of all the brilliant cortège which remained standing before the forsaken edifice.

CHAPTER XIV.

ALTHOUGH the feelings which Alfred had expressed at the first moment of hearing the intelligence which had so suddenly changed his destiny, were perfectly genuine, and as deeply seated in his heart for ever, as they were sincere at the moment he uttered them, it would have been difficult either for Mrs. Verepoint, or her daughter Charlotte, to have been persuaded when their drive with him was over, that he was really in the enjoyment of that perfectly resigned and well-contented state of mind, which had caused so much satisfaction to his parents. He had in truth never uttered a single syllable the whole way, and the first words he spoke after handing

them out were, "Will you have the kindness to tell Miss Drummond that I should be glad to speak to her?"

As it was very evident that the young man would be more at ease without their society than with it, the mother and daughter retired together, by no means displeased at being thus dismissed; for though neither of them were particularly addicted to gossip, they could not but feel a little impatient to communicate to Julia the wonderful events of the morning.

Glad indeed was Alfred to find himself at last alone. His thankfulness was genuine; nay, his perfect resignation to the event which called for this thankfulness, was genuine too; for the instant his truly high-toned and unsophisticated mind had been disenchanted, and the false colouring with which his senses had obscured his judgment removed, he felt that he had not loved Amelia Thorwold as he would wish to love his wife. It was not, therefore, in order to give way to any feelings on her account too strong to meet the public gaze, that

he so greatly rejoiced at finding himself alone; but it was that he might be at leisure to send back his memory over every word that had ever passed between himself and Julia on the subject of Miss Thorwold.

He wished for leisure and solitude to remember all this; but in wishing for it he wished rather for torture than pleasure. Oh! how he had treated that dear Julia! how he had dared to fancy that she loved him, and to attribute to jealousy every word, every look (and most involuntarily they had been many) by which she had betrayed a feeling of dislike to Amelia. Innocent Julia! Too pure, a million times too pure, to guess at the inward vileness, some incomprehensible emanation from which had caused the instinctive dislike which it was so evident she felt! And then came other thoughts. Was all that Amelia had said respecting her discovery of Julia's love for him a lie? It might be. Most probably it was. How could she know, or understand what passed in such a heart as Julia's? But then he recollected what his father had told him, of

her having refused to say that *she did not love the person to whom she had lent the money*; and as he remembered this, his eyes filled with tears, and his heart sunk within him, to think how very little he had deserved it. But his next thought dried his tears, by the burning blush it brought. He remembered the conversation he had overheard at the cottage of Jenkins, and the interpretation he had put upon it. Could Julia have hated and despised him for this interpretation as heartily as he hated and despised himself? Then came the recollection of her prompt unhesitating refusal of young Borrowdale; and, most unconsciously, he smiled as he thought of it. But with all this, whatever the reader may think of it, there was no idea, no notion, not the very slightest intention in the world of consoling himself for the baseness of his last love, by yielding to his inclination for a new one. Had any one accused him of this, he would have denied the charge with indignation, and have declared, with perfect sincerity, that Julia was much too angelic, both in purity of heart and supe-

Julia, trying to force a smile. "I do not think you have any thing to tell me, likely to shake my nerves."

"I don't know that, my dear child," said Mrs. Verepoint; "your nerves must be stronger than mine, if they can stand the history we bring you, unmoved."

"What do you mean?" said Julia, changing colour in a manner that rather falsified her promise of composure; "has any thing happened about Susan?"

"About Susan?" repeated the old lady. "We have seen no more of Susan, poor girl; but this we have found out about her, Julia, that she by no means knew all of the story she undertook to tell."

"But is any of it proved?" cried Julia, with both hands pressed against her heart as if it were bursting.

"Yes, my dear," replied the quiet old lady, "it is all proved, and a great deal more."

"And Alfred?"

"Why, I think Alfred is as well as can be expected," said Charlotte.

"He is not married to her?" cried Julia,

was an immense gathering which could not be dispersed in a moment. Our message is from Alfred, my dear, who desired us to say that he very greatly wished to see you."

"Indeed I cannot see him," replied Julia eagerly, and with a very visible change of complexion. "I suppose," she added, more quietly, after the interval of a moment, "I suppose he may wish to say something to me—to make some apology, I mean, about poor Susan; and to tell you the truth, my dear Mrs. Verepoint, I would rather not talk about it—for I do not think she was well treated."

"But is that reason enough for your refusing to see an old friend?" said Charlotte, reproachfully; "and at such a moment too?"

"No, it is not!" replied the candid Julia, determined at once to conquer the weakness which made her shrink from the meeting; "indeed, I ought to see him," she added, "for I want to send a message to my guardian."

The three ladies immediately descended together, and found Alfred walking with long strides up and down the library, in a

is over now, and I trust—" that your happiness has not received any lasting injury, she would have said, or something of the kind; but it was impossible. Alfred looked earnestly at her, and seemed to long to hear her speak again—to hear her finish what she seemed about to say—but he waited in vain for it. Julia changed the subject by putting the letter she had been employed in writing, into his hands. "Will you be so kind, Alfred," said she, "to give this letter to your father?"

"Is it to my father?" said he, less from curiosity than for the sake of saying something.

"It is to my Aunt M^c Kensie," she replied.

"Then why do you send it to my father?" said he, colouring, as he recalled the various discussions which had taken place respecting this old lady's reiterated invitations.

"Because I have forgotten the name of the post town," replied Julia.

No more was said on the subject, and the party sat down to luncheon in the dining-room. Fortunately Mrs. Verepoint felt her-

self sufficiently intimate and at her ease with Alfred to permit her conversing with him freely on the extraordinary event of the morning, and the subject was persevered in with the less restraint from its being evident that the hero of the tale rather wished to pursue the subject than leave it. He expressed with so much ingenuous frankness his consciousness of the preposterous folly which had prevented his even wishing to look deeper than the fair surface, while his love-fit lasted, that it was impossible in listening to him not to sympathise with the ardent thankfulness for his escape, which every word expressed, and the manners both of Charlotte and her mother became far more intimately affectionate to him than they had ever been before, but not so Julia ; she listened in perfect silence, nor ever once permitted even her eyes to express any interest in what was passing. Both Mrs. Verepoint and Charlotte believed that, with more pertinacity of resentment than they thought natural to her, she was still thinking of the rough usage and unceremonious dismissal of her favourite Susan ; and

it appeared that Alfred thought so too, for after suffering pretty severely from her cold silence for a considerable time, he suddenly said, " I hope, my dear Julia, that your poor Susan will forgive our abominable behaviour to her, and that she will come back to you immediately. Do you think she can forgive us, Julia?"

" I do not believe she was ever angry with you, Alfred ; she is a good-hearted and intelligent girl, and is too grateful to your father and mother for all their kindness to her, to permit her being conscious of any feeling like resentment."

" And she will return to you immediately, will she not?" said he.

" I have no doubt of it," replied Julia, and then she relapsed again into silence.

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It is needless, and moreover much too late in the day, to enter at length upon all the gossiping of the neighbourhood, respecting the extraordinary discovery of Lady William Hammond's previous marriage ; for the only amusing part of such an investigation would be

found in noting the enlarged degree of charity inspired by the title and fashion of the penniless scoundrel who was the hero of the tale, and this the worldly-wise would take for granted without being told of it, and the unworldly-wise would never very clearly understand.

The house throughout the whole neighbourhood where the discussion of the affair first seemed to become wearisome, was the Mount. There might be many reasons for this, but one certainly was the occurrence of a circumstance, seemingly of but little importance, and moreover one that was not only very likely to happen, but one that it was exceedingly right and proper should happen.

This was the departure of Julia Drummond for Scotland within a very short time after the events above narrated. That she should visit her nearest surviving relative as soon as her majority gave her the means of doing so, if she liked it, was undoubtedly the most natural thing in the world, especially as the old lady had regularly repeated her

invitation that she should do so, ever since she had been informed that "Julia was grown quite into a great girl."

Nevertheless, Colonel Dermont and Mrs. Dermont, and Mr. Alfred Dermont, could not recover from their astonishment upon finding that the young lady had actually arranged every thing for the expedition, and that Mrs. M'Kensie had actually fixed the day for her arrival.

Colonel and Mrs. Dermont did not choose to say so, but in their hearts they thought Julia very ungrateful for even fancying that she could find any residence endurable after the Mount. And Alfred lost himself in conjecture as to the cause of her taking so extraordinary a resolution. It would not, perhaps, be very easy to say at what precise moment after his becoming aware that he was no longer an engaged man, Alfred had found in the very bottom of his heart a little hidden pearl of affection, which he thought might help to console him for the loss of the beautiful Amelia. Nor does it matter. The discovery *was* made; and the interval between his hope of becoming the husband of Amelia, and his hope of becoming the hus-

band of Julia, was not very long. Alfred, gentle reader, was not yet twenty-one; and herein must be found his excuse, if any be needed, for the rapidity with which one set of feelings was chased by another, under circumstances however, which, it is but fair to allow, might excuse a rather considerable change of feeling in any man.

In a word, he was neither puzzled nor perplexed for a moment as to the best means of consoling himself for what he had lost. But, on the other hand, he was greatly puzzled and perplexed to decide, to his own satisfaction how far Julia was likely to agree with him in opinion upon this subject. How far she loved him? Or, whether she loved him at all?

The lamentable blunder into which he had fallen in his interpretation of her conversation with Susan, had so severely shaken his faith in his own sagacity, that he dared no longer speculate with any confidence on many and many dear recollections that nestled round his heart; yet, after all the timidity he could muster, and all the schooling he could give himself, he was not in despair; and after he had endured the very dreary

blank which her absence made, for rather more than a month, he informed his father and mother, that, with their good leave, he intended to ask Julia Drummond if she would consent to forget the folly of his first choice, and console him for all its consequences by becoming his wife.

The time had been when both the colonel and his lady would have started in dismay at such a proposition. But somehow or other, they could hardly have explained the reason why, their ideas had altered a good deal. The process had been gradual, and each little step in it had been impelled by some little special cause. Julia had grown tall and handsome. Julia had refused the son, and probably the heir, of a peer. Julia was of age, and in possession of her little fortune. Julia had been right, about Susan, when they had been all wrong; and last, though by no means least, Julia had actually found means to withdraw herself from the matchless Mount, and to write word that she was very well, and happy, afterwards.

Thus, then, Julia Drummond was not quite the same Julia Drummond as formerly; moreover, young as she was, there was some-

thing about her character that offered so agreeable a contrast to the terrific matron that had crossed their path in the shape of a young lady of fashion, that the father looked at the mother, and the mother looked at the father, with a smile, as they listened to this new proposal from their son.

"Well, my dear boy," said the colonel, after remaining silent for about half a moment, as if he were doubtfully weighing his proposal, "well, I do not see any great objection, I confess. What do you say, my dear?"

"Why, really, colonel, considering what we have seen of the conduct of beautiful young ladies of whom we did not know enough to judge thoroughly, I confess I am inclined to think that there would be more wisdom in Alfred's marrying our own little Julia, than in urging him to set off upon any fresh chase after strangers."

Thus sanctioned, Alfred, with a beating heart, sat down to tell the friend of his whole life, the dear companion, whose value he had only learnt since he had lost her, that if she only would consent to be his wife, he would consent to be her pupil for evermore, as he

had been in days of yore; and that if she would not grow weary of teaching, he should never grow weary of learning—in the hope that the time might come when, at last, he might be more worthy to approach her as an equal, than he could possibly be till she had consented to become his loved and lovely instructress, and his compassionate guardian angel through life. The letter was really a very charming letter, full of truth and feeling, and the reader should have it entire, had I a few more blank pages before me.

This letter reached its destination safely. It was the third which Julia had received from him since her arrival at Eagle's Cliff, and the two former ones had both been long letters, and very affectionate, though her reply to the first—the second she had not as yet replied to at all—was rather reserved, though kind, and by no means so long as his own.

Then why, when Julia opened this third letter, did she feel so very certain that it contained something more important than its predecessors? Was it because the lines were closer together? Or was it because he had

not waited for an answer to his last? Or was it because her eye instantly caught sight of the interjection "oh!" close to her own name? Whatever might be the cause, she felt that she could not read it in the presence of her pleasant, and quite wide-awake old aunt, and therefore she got up very quietly, and walked out of the room. She was quite out of breath when she got to her own chamber, but that might be because she had stepped up the stairs very rapidly. And having reached a charming, high-backed old chair, in which she had accustomed herself, since her residence at Eagle's Cliff, to take all her meditations, self-examinations, and such like exercises, she seated herself therein, and read the letter. Fast and full flowed her tears as she read on; and doubtless they were, in part, delicious tears, yet not so much so perhaps, as most people, had her heart been known to them, might have expected.

If Alfred had spent many hours of every day since they parted, in rehearsing to himself the various little passages of their past lives, in which Julia had shown symptoms of affection for him, so had Julia likewise. And Julia, being of the two the best in-

formed on the subject, had earliest and most decidedly come to the conviction that again, and again, and again, she had betrayed herself.

The consequence of this was that before she went to bed that night, she wrote a letter, not more than one-eighth part so long as his, in which she gently, gratefully, meekly, but most decidedly, declined his offered hand. Then, breathing one deep sigh, as she sealed her despatch, she exclaimed "No, my dearest Alfred! You shall not make shipwreck of your happiness a second time by mistaking your heart. You have found out, painfully enough, no doubt, that admiration is not love. Nor is pity either, Alfred. And that you would find out too, were I weak and wicked enough to listen to you."

* * * * *

The effect of this letter upon the unfortunate Alfred was really terrible. His pride, his self-esteem, his undoubting confidence in the affection of almost all who approached him, had all been trampled down to the very dust by his adventure with the worthless Amelia, but the image of the pure, the innocent, the high principled Julia Drum-

mond had almost at the very moment of the frightful discovery, risen before him like an angel of light, and on this dear image his mind had fixed itself with a confiding firmness which had at once removed all shadow of weakness from his feelings and from his conduct.

But what, and where was he now? Of all created beings he believed himself the most profoundly miserable, and truly there was much in his position to make him feel so. The ceaseless course of unlimited indulgence in which he had been trained, had ill prepared him for suffering of any kind, and even his very best qualities, his generous and confiding nature, and the warm affections of his heart, all tended to increase his suffering. Could he, as he laid down his aching head upon that fatal letter, have had the power, by a wish, of falling asleep upon it for ever, it is to be feared that he would have yielded to the temptation. If Julia had seen him at that moment, could she have seen him sinking from his high hopes, into the miserable weakness of despair, and beheld her own bright image fading from his mind, and leaving the dark chilling void of

hopelessness behind it, could she have forgiven herself?

For many hours Alfred hid himself from every eye, and then, his resolution being taken, he sought his parents, with Julia's letter open in his hand. The indignation, the astonishment with which it was read may easily be imagined. But Alfred suffered them not long to dwell upon it. His only wish now was to leave England, and of course their only wish was that he should do so, in the way most agreeable to himself. "Did he wish to go alone?"

"No. He wished that they should accompany him ; but on condition that the name of Julia Drummond should never be mentioned between them." It was no vindictive feeling, but quite the contrary, which dictated this condition. Alfred knew that the heart of Julia had been bruised in his presence by the insulting spirit of the hateful Amelia. He had seen it, and adored that Amelia still. Could she forgive this? He had dared to hope it, but now felt that it must be impossible ; and he would not again outrage her name by suffering it to be pronounced with resentment.

* * * * *

For four long years the devoted parents, leaving their Mount, and their greatness, wandered with him over nearly the whole of Europe, and though he could not so far recover his tranquillity as to consent to return to a spot he so dreaded to see as the house where he and Julia had grown and lived together in such sweet union, the interval was not lost, or useless. He never conquered his regret, his remorse, for the folly that had lost her; but neither did he let it so conquer him, as to destroy his energy and intelligence amidst scenes so well calculated to rouse all his highest faculties into action, as were many of those amidst which he lingered. At length the sudden death of one of the principal tenants upon Colonel Dermont's estate made his return to Stoke absolutely necessary, and when the choice of remaining abroad or returning to England was indulgently offered him, he consented to return—not, however, to the Mount—he had not yet sufficient courage for that, and his father readily consented that he should remain in London, while he and Mrs. Dermont, both longing to see the place as much as Alfred dreaded it, proceeded to Stoke without him.

* * * *

Meanwhile, Julia had found a maternal friend and a very tranquil home at Eagle's Cliff. She had found, too, a fine old library there, and the gay little girl was growing rapidly into the studious woman, when Mrs. M'Kensie's only daughter, who was married to a wealthy Scotch baronet, invited her to accompany their family to London, for a few weeks. Julia did not feel the temptation to be very strong, for she did not fancy that she should like London. But Mrs. M'Kensie very cordially approved of her daughter's proposal, and Julia, within a week after it was made, found herself the inmate of a very gay-looking house in Grosvenor-place.

Sir James and Lady Bruce had a large circle of acquaintance, and Julia was far from unamused at the variety of new scenes to which she was introduced. Ball followed ball in rapid succession; and Julia, though sometimes a little weary, yielded unresistingly to the wishes of her gay friend, and spent abundance of money in fine dresses, and abundance of nights with little sleep, without grumbling.

At last, however, a trouble came upon her, which made her look forward with a good deal of impatience to their return home. Julia, who had grown into very perfect loveliness, and who had speedily become one of the acknowledged beauties of the season, received an offer of marriage, which raised the triumph of her obliging friends to the very highest pitch; and so very determined were they that the foolish girl should not be permitted to mar her own fortune, that the more poor Julia persisted in assuring his lordship that she could not do herself the honour of accepting him, the more they privately assured him, contrariwise, that he must not suppose her refusal meant any thing beyond youthful shyness.

Lord Elton, though by no means deficient in intellect, on most occasions, was on this incapable of receiving the true answer, which drove him half mad, instead of the false one, which persuaded him to fancy that he was at the gates of Paradise. All this had gone on for a week or two, and Julia was beginning to feel vexed and angry, when matters were brought to a conclusion in the

following unexpected manner. Lord Elton, though not so much vexed as Julia, was beginning to think that the fair one, at whose feet he was willing to lay both his coronet and himself for ever, notwithstanding all her angelic attributes, was rather unfairly trifling with him, and he determined that his fate should be decided one way or the other, before a certain ball, where he knew he should meet her, should come to a close.

Having screwed his courage very firmly to this resolution, he stood ready, almost at the door, to receive her at her entrance, engaged her to dance, presented his arm, and led her, not to the dance, but to a small room prepared for chess and flirtation, at a very quiet distance from it. There was so much determination in the gentleman's manner of performing this manœuvre that it would not have been very easy to resist it, if she had wished to do so ; but she did not ; for she, too, thought it was quite time to convince his lordship that she was in earnest.

He had placed her on a sofa which occupied a recess in the wall, and seating himself in a chair opposite to her, he began in a manner equally earnest and respectful, to re-

peat the humble hope that time, and a conviction of his devoted love, might at length operate in his favour.

There was at first a sort of restless impatience in her eye, that seemed to express a wish that he should go on and finish, that she might answer him. But then, the eye became fixed, and there was a deep emotion, an anxious uncertainty, in its expression, which he could not comprehend, but felt convinced, at last, that at any rate it did not speak indifference. He pursued his theme, he conjured her to answer him. And then she started, and withdrawing her eyes from the object upon which they had been fixed, said,

“What have you been saying, sir?—I beg your pardon—my lord, I beg your pardon, but indeed, indeed, I know not a single word that you have spoken to me.”

Astonished and irritated beyond bearing, Lord Elton started up, following with his eyes the direction which hers had taken, and he certainly had reason to suspect that they had *not* been bent on vacancy, for on the opposite side of the small room stood a figure that might have fixed the eye of any lady in the world.

A young man considerably above the common height, with very strikingly handsome features, and a form of peculiar dignity and grace, stood leaning against the frame of the door which led from one of the larger apartments. A single glance sufficed to show that he was as completely engaged in gazing at Miss Drummond as it was possible Miss Drummond could be in gazing at him ; and there was something too in his attitude, and the expression of his countenance, which seemed to indicate as strong a degree of agitation on his part as the young lady had displayed on hers.

This indeed seemed to be the decisive moment ; at any rate it was plain that the agitated young nobleman intended to make it so, for with no other respect for the presence of this unwelcome intruder than the merely lowering his voice to something like a whisper, he said, " Julia ! Miss Drummond !" and then, in a lower voice still, he went on, " answer me, I conjure you ! I have placed my honour, my happiness, almost my life in your hands ; and, in return, I only ask to know your will. Julia, is there any hope for me ? Who is the man on whom you have

been looking so earnestly? Is he—tell me at once, Julia, is he nearer and dearer to you than I can ever be? Julia Drummond! tell me! May I ever hope that you will be my wife?"

"Never, never," replied Julia, with a decisiveness of tone which if a positive and direct answer was all that he required, ought to have contented him, for it was impossible that any thing could be more positive and direct. It might certainly have been somewhat more courteous and more gentle, and so it doubtless would have been, had not Alfred Dermont (for it was no other), been standing (seen for the first time for more than four years) exactly opposite to her.

Lord Elton looked at her earnestly for a moment, and then, very boldly indifferent to the stranger's presence, seized her hand and kissed it.

"God bless you!" he exclaimed, and passed through a door which opened near the sofa, with a movement so rapid, that he had gone from her sight for ever, before her understanding had fully received the meaning of his solemn farewell.

"Julia!" exclaimed Alfred, springing for-

ward. "Julia Drummond!—so—so exquisitely—yet ever, ever the same! Who was that man, Julia?—who is he?—what is he?"

"It was Lord Elton," replied Julia, with unnatural quietness of manner; for her heart was beating like the paddles of a steam-boat that had some royal freight aboard, and being resolutely determined to get the better of it, she had rather overdone the business, and looked more like an alabaster statue than a living, loving, breathing woman.

"What right had he to call you Julia? What right had he to kiss your hand? What was it you told him could never, never be? Had he dared to speak of me? Did he dare to extract a promise from you concerning me?"

Alfred Dermont was vastly improved in many ways since they had parted last, but at that particular moment Julia had no great reason to believe that he had in any degree conquered his impetuosity, for not only did he speak with a vehemence that frightened her, but his eyes were turned towards the door by which the discarded nobleman had made his exit in a manner that strongly suggested the idea that he was going to follow him.

"He never mentioned you. He extracted no promise concerning you!" cried the terrified Julia, involuntarily stretching out her hand to check the anticipated movement, and laying it upon his arm.

"Nay, Julia," said Alfred, in a softened voice, and gently, slowly, lingeringly removing the little hand that was meant to restrain him, "do not fancy that any force beyond the very slightest expression of your wishes can be necessary to prevent my asking these same questions too rudely of Lord Elton. I will never quarrel with any man whose safety is dear to you, Julia."

"He never can be any thing to me," cried Julia, with a little more of her statue-like composure, "and you heard me tell him so."

"And you have told me the same, Julia," returned Alfred in a tone of the most profound melancholy. "I hope, in common charity I hope, that he will not dwell for lingering years upon the words with the same ceaseless misery that I have done."

Having said this, he dropped into the chair that Lord Elton had occupied, and neither of them uttered a word for what appeared to both to be an enormous interval; but Julia very plainly heard the beating of her own

heart, and she was horribly afraid that he would hear it too.

"Julia!" he said, at length, "I firmly believed that I could never hope again; for more than four years I have believed the letter you wrote to me from Eagle's Cliff had sealed my fate for ever; and what leads me to think otherwise at this moment? Who shall say? I cannot. I cannot even guess why it is that, in defiance of that letter, in defiance of your own assurance, so calmly, so deliberately given, I should be mad enough to risk the agony of another refusal. But were I to ask the same question of you that I presume that unhappy young man to have asked—if once more I were to ask you to be my wife, would you repeat your tremendous 'Never! never?'"

The eyes of Julia were fixed upon the carpet; for Alfred spoke slowly, very slowly; and it would have been impossible for her to have remained looking at him all the time; but when he stopped, quite stopped, she raised her eyes, and though she met his, which were most intently fixed upon her, she very distinctly answered "No." The word was not spoken loudly, quite the contrary indeed, but, probably from the circum-

stance of its standing alone, it was remarkably distinct.

* * * *

And this, gentle reader, is all the love-making between my hero and heroine with which I can favour you. Had Alfred been able to fall at her feet at the moment, I might have been tempted perhaps to tell you something about it, for that sort of thing is always very interesting ; but this was rendered quite impossible by the entrance of company. And when the first emotion of an author is over it is very difficult to rekindle it again on the same theme,—it is, however, so particularly easy to guess all that came afterwards, that there is but little reason to regret the interruption. Suffice it to say, that by the particular advice of Mrs. Dermont, given by letter, and of Lady Bruce, given by *vivâ voce*, Julia took advantage of the lucky circumstance of her being in London, to buy her wedding-clothes ; and that as soon as possible after her return to Eagle's Cliff, her marriage with Alfred was celebrated there, the colonel taking the long journey thither from the Mount, that he might satisfy his conscience, as he said, by performing the last office of a guardian in giving her away. The preparations for the

wedding were considerably shortened, by the marriage settlement prepared for the beautiful Amelia, serving as a corrected draft of that which was required on the present occasion.

* * * *

But the curtain cannot be dropped, without bringing, in the usual manner, the principal *dramatis personæ* for a few minutes upon the stage.

The Lord and Lady William Hammond, who were brought together for the space of several months by the spirited exertions of Lord Ripley, did not, upon the whole, enjoy a very prosperous career. They were divorced before the end of the second year of their union; but his lordship did not make so good a thing of it as he expected, for though the lover of his lady was a very wealthy personage, there were several circumstances brought forward on the trial, which tended to create a doubt whether the lady's husband had sustained much damage in the affair; and twenty pounds was all that he obtained by his successful action. Neither did this person think proper to marry the lady, and the later scenes of her career are buried in total darkness.

The acquaintance between Miss Celestina Marsh and Mr. Macnab increased so rapidly

during the breakfast-party at Beech Hill, that the gentleman having been told by some one or other, that Mr. Tremayne Marsh, was "certain not to marry," and very "likely not to live," proposed an elopement to Gretna Green by way of a frolic to the lady, to which she acceded in the most gay and good-humoured manner imaginable. It is an undoubted fact, certainly, that they were both of age; but for some reasons, best known to himself, the North Briton preferred bringing matters to a conclusion at once, and assuring his charming bride that he should look forward with the greatest pleasure to making the acquaintance of her brother hereafter, whisked her away first to Gretna Green and then to Australia.

As soon as the news reached her brother, he hastened to return, full of self-reproaches, for having neglected his duty, and determined upon making such a settlement upon his sister as should secure her from want—to which brotherly purpose he minutely dedicated one-half of his paternal inheritance. But the unfortunate Celestina did not live to profit by this kindness; for before the deeds were executed, news arrived of her having perished by shipwreck, together with her

husband, and many other passengers. Poor George looked as conscience-stricken and miserable as if he had contrived and executed the whole business. Every body was very kind to him, but the ladies at the Grange particularly so. Nevertheless, it was so evident to them that his spirits continued to be depressed, that Charlotte Verepoint became at length quite convinced that the only way effectually to repair the loss of his sister, was to give herself to him as a wife. And this she did, to the entire satisfaction of her mother, and by the harmony which has ever since existed between the well-restored and tastefully decorated Locklow Wood and the Grange, there is every reason to believe that all parties continue perfectly well satisfied with the match.

Mrs. Stephens is the mother of many charming young Stephenses, but is herself grown so fat and heavy, that she has quite abandoned the character of a young married woman. Mr. Stephens, on the contrary, is grown exceedingly cross, and exceedingly thin, and has been occupied incessantly during the last six months in labouring to coax his lady out of a sum of money sufficient to

enable him to pay a visit to his friends in the United States, that he might exert the energies of his own fine spirit, in examining the fine issues of theirs. But whether he will succeed or not, is still very doubtful.

THE END.



